

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ARMY

1939-45

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Edinburgh

1992



ABSTRACT

During the course of the Second World War the small, traditionally conservative pre-war Regular Army absorbed some three million new recruits, the vast majority of them conscripts. The objective of the thesis is to assess the impact of this process on the Army as a social institution. In order to achieve this, six areas of the Army's social organization have been examined: other rank selection, officer selection, promotion, officer-man relations, welfare and education.

The results of research show that the Army did change in relation to its new intake. It became an institution seemingly more careful of human values, more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the ordinary soldier, and more democratic in spirit. Yet traditionalist elements in the Army remained unconvinced of new methods and techniques, and tempered their application in a number of the areas investigated. Change there was, but not perhaps as deep-seated as some might have hoped.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis, and the research recorded in it,
is the sole and original work of the author.

J. A. Crang.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staffs of Edinburgh University Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Public Record Office, the Imperial War Museum, the Ministry of Defence Whitehall Library, the Prince Consort's Army Library, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives and the Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive, for their unfailing courtesy and helpfulness. I also wish to thank the many old soldiers who related their experiences to me, and in particular to Mr. Jack Davies, Mr. Bernard Ungerson and Dr. Boris Semeonoff for commenting on draft chapters. My gratitude is further due to my supervisors, Dr. Paul Addison and Mr. Terry Cole, for their advice, support and friendship, and to the Economic and Social Research Council for awarding me a grant to undertake this thesis.

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To my Mother,
with love and thanks

1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent years academic study of the British Army has come to focus not just on the campaigns and battles it has fought, but increasingly on how it organizes itself as a social institution. Indeed, the work of historians such as Hew Strachan, Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, Alan Skelley, Edward Spiers, Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson have given us new insights into the Army's function in this respect, from the early Victorian age through to the First World War.¹ There has though been little detailed study of the British Army during the Second World War in these terms, and this thesis attempts to fill that gap.

On the eve of the Second World War the small, peacetime Regular Army of some 220,000 men was still in many ways an intensely conservative social institution. Certainly, under Leslie Hore-Belisha, who became Secretary of State for War in May 1937, some changes had taken place. Faced with a recruiting crisis in the 1930s which was conceived as being in large part due to the continuing archaic nature of military life, efforts were made to improve the

¹ Hew Strachan, *Wellington's Legacy. The Reform of the British Army 1830-54* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); Alan Ramsey Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press; London: Croom Helm, 1977); Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1980); Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army. 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson, eds., *A Nation in Arms. A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

terms and conditions of service and to make the Army a more attractive career prospect for its officers and men.² Yet the Army was to remain an essentially inward-looking organization which shared few of the values of the civilian society it served. As one young journalist, William Shebbeare, was to observe on joining the Service in 1939: "The present-day army lacks every one of those characteristics of a democratic army."³

During the Second World War, and for the second time in the century, this institution was forced to absorb a generation of civilians into its ranks. With the threat of war looming, in May 1939 the Military Training Act was introduced which required all men of twenty years to undergo six months training in the Forces. On the outbreak of war in September this was superseded by the National Service (Armed Forces) Act which imposed a liability to military service on all males between eighteen and forty-one for the duration of the emergency. Whilst voluntary recruitment continued to play an important subsidiary role, between 1939 and 1945 the Army absorbed nearly three million men, three-quarters of

²R. J. Minney *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), pp. 39-40; Brian Bond, "Leslie Hore-Belisha at the War Office," in *Politicians and Defence. Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy 1845-1970*, eds. Ian F. W. Beckett and John Gooch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 117-118, 121, 129.

³Captain X [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944).

whom were conscripts.⁴ Drawn from all occupational groups and social backgrounds, generally better educated than their forefathers of the First World War, more critical of those in authority and less convinced of war's contribution to society, the military authorities were confronted with the task of moulding these civilians in uniform into an effective fighting force. It was, in the words of one wartime soldier, "a fascinating human problem."⁵

The objective of this thesis is to seek to assess the impact of this process of integration on the Army as a social institution. In order to do this, six major areas of the Army's social organization will be examined: other rank selection, officer selection, promotion, officer-man relations, welfare and education. In so doing the degree to which the Army changed in relation to its new intake will be assessed, what the nature and extent of any change that took place actually was; and how different the Army of 1945 was from that of 1939. Moreover, in a wider context, some conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between the Army and society and the impact of war on society which continue to be areas of much

⁴Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 277/12, "Manpower Problems," War Office Monograph compiled by Maj.-Gen. A. J. K. Pigott, 1949, pp. 7, 12, 80; H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower. A Study of War-time Policy and Administration* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), pp. 54-55, 485. The National Service (Armed Forces) Act did not apply in N. Ireland.

⁵A. Cotterell, *Oh it's Nice to be in the Army* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1941), p. 7. Italics mine.

debate.

It must also be noted that this thesis refers very largely to the Army at home, since that was where the bulk of it was stationed for most of the war. Indeed, it was not until after D.Day that the majority of the Army was overseas, and even by the end of the war over a million men out of a total of nearly three million were still serving at home.⁶ The experience of the average wartime soldier was not one of "daring deeds at the sharp end," but rather of a sedentary existence in a camp or depot somewhere in Britain, cleaning his boots and wondering why he was there.

⁶ WO 163/48, War Office Progress Report, A.E.25., June 1940; WO 163/51, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(42)34., September 1942; WO 163/53, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(44)38., September, 1944; WO 163/54, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(45)6., March 1945.

2. OTHER RANK SELECTION

One of the major problems the Army faced as a result of its great expansion related to the selection of recruits for the wide range and variety of occupations implicit in any modern military machine. During the period of conscription in the First World War some preliminary sifting of recruits had taken place. In 1916 the new Directorate of Organization at the War Office issued instructions to those who allocated soldiers to jobs to use each man's experience and abilities to good advantage.¹ However, the Army had always been, and would remain in the post-war era, a volunteer force and as such recruits were posted more or less in accordance with their wishes. There was no really rational system of personnel selection.

Moreover, despite poor manpower planning and misplacement during 1914-18,² the recommendations of the post-war Southborough Committee which called for action to be taken to prevent temperamentally unsuitable men from joining the Service,³ and the advances made by the

¹Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 277/19, "Personnel Selection," War Office Monograph compiled by Col. B. Ungerson, 1953, p. 1.

²F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies. Manpower and Organisation in Two World Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 36-37; Gen. Sir Hugh Elles, "Our Nineteen-Forty Army," *The Listener* 23 (April 1940), p. 737.

³*Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell Shock,'* Cmd. 1734 (June 1922), pp. 161-193.

American and German Armies in scientific selection methods,⁴ the British Army made little progress in this field. Medical entry standards were relaxed and the maximum age of enlistment raised by Hore-Belisha in 1937 in an effort to improve the poor levels of recruitment.⁵ Yet apart from a few limited experiments within individual Corps, little attention was paid to selection. Peacetime soldiers on long-term engagements, it was considered, had plenty of training time to become fully adept in their chosen Arms.⁶ Indeed, when in April 1939, as a result of the announcement by the Ministry of Pensions of restricted provision for the wartime victims of neurosis, a psychiatrist, Dr. J. R. Rees, and psychologist, Alec Rodger, submitted a fairly complete scientific selection scheme to the War Office drawing on results of research in industrial psychology, it was rejected.⁷ The War Office may have had more pressing matters on its mind,⁸ the stresses of war may not have

⁴ Cyril Burt, "Psychology in Wartime," *The Spectator* 169 (August 1942), pp. 166-167; Philip E. Vernon and John B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces* (London: University of London Press, 1949), p. 17-23.

⁵ R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), pp. 43, 46.

⁶ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 2.

⁷ R. H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 15, 31.

⁸ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 2.

been adequately foreseen,⁹ but it was also clear that vocational psychology was not held in high esteem by the Army authorities, nor within government circles.¹⁰ On the contrary, the selection scheme adopted at the beginning of the war was, to a very large extent, ad hoc.

The administrative machinery having been put in place from the Spring of 1939 during the period of the Military Training Act, men liable to be called up for service under the wartime National Service Act were required to register at one of the local offices of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. There each man was required to furnish certain personal information as an aid to placement, and could express a preference for one of the Services although no guarantees could be given.

After the initial sorting of registration, men who were not reserved for industry or granted deferment were summoned to a medical examination at a Recruiting Centre. Each man was graded according to fitness for service and then interviewed by the Recruiting Officer of the Service he hoped, or was destined, to join. If a man was interviewed for the Army he had the chance to put forward his views on the Corps or Arm he wished to serve with, and on his own relevant qualifications and abilities.

⁹Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Adam Papers [hereafter Adam], Adam VIII, typescript narrative by Gen. Sir Ronald Adam on "Various Administrative Aspects of the Army during the Second World War," 1963, chap. 2, pp. 1, 12.

¹⁰Vernon and Parry, pp. 23-24.

Once the interview was completed the officer recorded his remarks and recommendations for posting, taking into account a man's preferences, age, physical and mental capabilities, civilian occupation and experience. Men with certain kinds of skills were earmarked for one of the many service trades.

The Recruiting Officer's recommendations were then forwarded to the Regional Offices of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, who endeavoured to post men to Corps or regiments in accordance with War Office manpower requirements, and as far as possible associated with a recruit's home locality. In the first instance, men were posted to appropriate Corps or Regimental Training Units to undergo between eight and twenty-two weeks of Corps training depending on the Corps, before being posted to a unit or battalion.¹¹

The procedure by which a volunteer was initiated into the Army followed similar lines. A volunteer registered his name at either a local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service or at a Recruiting Centre and was interviewed by the Recruiting Officer in the same way as those liable under the National Service Act. He was posted, as far as possible, in accordance with his

¹¹ *Ministry of Labour and National Service. Report for the Years 1939-6*, Cmd. 7225 (September 1947), pt. 1, pp. 12, 21, 26; H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower. A Study of War-time Policy and Administration* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), pp. 150-153.

wishes.^{1 2}

Under this existing system, then, a man's future role in the Army was, by and large, defined by an interviewing officer after a short meeting with the recruit. In this sense it was based on the system that had selected and allocated regular volunteers in peacetime.

It was crucial, particularly in view of the pressing time factor that came to dominate every military task, that the Army efficiently used its limited manpower resources. In this respect it faced two particular problems. In the first instance, it had to place in suitable employment a large number of dull and backward men. Not only were large numbers of able men reserved in industry or claimed by the Civil Defence Services, but the Navy and R.A.F. proved to be more popular preferences, and with their more stringent entry requirements were able to take what seemed to them the best material. The Army, having the largest manpower requirements and able only to reject the medically unfit, thus absorbed a relatively higher proportion of less able recruits.

At the same time it had to make the very best use of its more able recruits. Modern warfare had vastly increased the Army's demand for soldiers of high intelligence and

^{1 2} *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 352 (1936-39), col. 346.

education to fill its more technical jobs. About one quarter of all troops were employed as tradesmen, whilst perhaps as many more did work which called for particular skills. Competing demands ensured that the Army was nearly always short of skilled manpower. This meant that the Army had always to be on the look out for men with the capacity to be trained from scratch.

However, during the early years of the war the existing selection and allocation system came to be seen as increasingly inadequate in these respects. There were a number of inherent weaknesses. Primarily, there was no detailed record of the range of employments within the Army, nor of the aptitudes and temperamental characteristics necessary to carry them out satisfactorily, a problem complicated by the fact that few military occupations had a direct civilian equivalent.

In addition, there was no comprehensive assessment of how a man could be most efficiently employed and placed within the framework of Army employments, or indeed whether he could be suitably employed at all. There was no thorough mental examination of recruits on intake, and the Recruiting Officer's interview could only partially reveal a man's general capacity to learn, his specific abilities and his personality traits. In practice the interview tended to be even more unsatisfactory. Recruiting Officers were not trained in the art of

interviewing, nor were there any guidelines to ensure information could be interpreted and applied uniformly.

Furthermore, under the existing system recruits were recommended for and allocated to a Corps or regiment. There was, however, a very wide range of jobs to be done in each Corps. The Royal Engineers, for example, needed not only skilled mechanical tradesmen but drivers, storekeepers, clerks and domestic staff. To recommend a man to a Corps was thus to make no recommendation as to the type of work he should undertake.¹³

The problem was compounded by the fact that if a man was misplaced the machinery of transfer was complicated. The loyalty of both men and commanding officers was often, in the first instance, a loyalty to their particular Corps or regiments, and with their strong local associations and sectional interests this inevitably set up obstacles.¹⁴

Admittedly, some efforts were made to classify recruits at the training stage. In late 1939 Anti-Aircraft Command accepted an offer from Professor Frederick Bartlett, a

¹³ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 4-8; War Office Directorate for Selection of Personnel [hereafter D.S.P.], "Personnel Selection in the British Army," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Management Congress*, (Stockholm, 1947), vol. 1, pp. 451-452.

¹⁴ D.S.P., pp. 6, 10; WO 199/1642, Minutes of the Commander-in-Chief's (Home Forces) Conference, C.R.H.F.1/828(G)., 15 February 1940; WO 163/48, Notes of the Proceedings of the Army Council, A.C.M.(A. E.)17., 21 August 1940.

psychologist from Cambridge University, to design tests to allot soldiers to the most appropriate duties in gun teams. In the Summer of 1940, at the suggestion of the Medical Research Council, Eric Farmer, another psychologist from Cambridge University, was charged by the Director of Military Training with the task of devising tests for all intakes to training and field units within Home Commands. These were designed to accelerate training and identify potential specialists, and those who scored poorly were referred to Army psychiatrists.¹⁵

Although useful experiments, these initiatives could not remedy the inherent weaknesses in the system. With no military branch appointed to act as executive, the effective employment of the tests relied upon the cooperation of commanding officers which was not always forthcoming. Moreover, the selection technique had limited possibilities as a manpower weapon unless all recruits could be posted from the beginning of their Army careers on the basis of the results.¹⁶

Concern amongst the military authorities grew. From the Spring of 1940 Lieutenant-Colonel G. R. Hargreaves, the Command Psychiatrist, Northern Command, carried out a number of experiments amongst training units in his area.

¹⁵ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 9; Ahrenfeldt, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 9-10.

The results revealed not only the value of tests in placing men in jobs best suited to them, but also a catalogue of existing misplacement which, it was estimated, would be evident in every training centre and field unit in the Army. In January 1941 Hargreaves submitted a memorandum to the command authorities, entitled "Notes on the Efficient Use of Manpower," and in March another, "The Selection and Allocation of Army Personnel." In these papers he outlined the results of his investigations and recommended that testing should be carried out before recruits were allocated to Corps, and that both the testing and disposal of recruits be placed under the control of a special War Office department.¹⁷

This work enjoyed the full support of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command, Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald Adam, a regular officer who had risen to high rank during the inter-war years and had commanded the Third Army Corps at Dunkirk, but a man unusually open to new ideas and methods. In October 1940 he had written to the War Office that it was important that the Army, as the greatest single employer of labour, should appreciate the value of testing in the same way that industrial undertakings and the Ministry of Labour had done in recent years, and in the early months of 1941 he made several representations to the War Office

¹⁷ Ahrenfeldt, pp. 37-38.

on the basis of Hargreaves' documents.¹⁸

As a result of these promptings a committee of psychologists was appointed by the War Office in the Spring to inquire into the matter. Under the chairmanship of the Director-General Army Medical Services, it included Professor J. Drever, Dr. C. S. Myers and Dr. S. J. F. Philpott, and was later joined by Professor C. Burt and Professor Bartlett.¹⁹

At the end of May 1941 General Adam left Northern Command to become Adjutant-General at the War Office, thus assuming responsibility for selection matters. In June he submitted a paper to the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) which outlined just how inefficiently the Army was using its manpower resources. On the basis of the tests conducted in Northern Command, it was estimated that 4% of all intakes were useless for training as soldiers, 20% of every infantry intake and 50% of every Tank Regiment intake had not the intelligence for full efficiency in the Corps to which they had been posted, and 20% of every infantry intake and 50% of every Pioneer Corps intake were capable of efficient service in a more skilled Arm than the one to which they had been assigned.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 12.

²⁰ WO 163/84, "Selection Tests for the Army," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(41)4., 7 June 1941.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the war as it developed made it necessary for the Army to change its major effort, at relatively short notice, from one type of warfare to another, or from defensive to offensive action, which meant modifying the ratios of different Corps within the Service. Under the existing arrangements there was no means of comprehensively varying the distribution of recruits entering the Army in accordance with specific demands, nor was there the means of efficiently converting units to new roles, since it was largely a matter of conjecture as to whether a soldier could successfully adapt to a new job. With the Army at this stage converting in order to expand its armoured formations, it was thus additionally important that selection be improved.²¹

Moreover, not only did this misplacement have obvious implications for operational efficiency, but also for morale. Often men tended to become maladjusted either through feelings of inferiority or frustration. As two Army psychiatrists recorded:

It had been expected that there would be psychiatric casualties arising from the stress of active service but what had not been foreseen was the extent of the psychiatric breakdown rate during training amongst those who had no experience of action. It became apparent that one of the most important causes of difficulty in adjustment to the Army was the unsuitable

²¹ D.S.P., p. 451.

employment within the Army itself. A large number of soldiers were occupied in work which was either above or below their capacity and, in either case, dissatisfaction, poor morale and even breakdown were apt to follow.²²

The concern amongst the military authorities was set against a background of growing discontent within civilian circles. During the Summer of 1941 the Select Committee on National Expenditure was inquiring into the allocation of manpower to the Army, and the Ministry of Labour and National Service appointed Sir William Beveridge to investigate the use of skilled manpower in the Services, with particular emphasis on engineering skills. Criticism of the arbitrary methods employed by the Army was reflected in a stream of parliamentary questions²³ and comment in the press. "I frequently read that this is a technician's war," wrote one frustrated soldier, "but it appears that the qualities required of a soldier are no different from those required in the days of Waterloo."²⁴

Clearly, some reform of the selection and allocation system was necessary. In his paper to the E.C.A.C. in

²² Lt.-Col. J. D. Sutherland and Maj. G. A. Fitzpatrick, "Some Approaches to Group Problems in the British Army," *Group Psychotherapy* (New York, 1945), p. 444.

²³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 359 (1939-40), col. 27; Ibid., vol. 359 (1939-40), cols. 811-812; Ibid., vol. 368 (1940-41), cols. 1202-1203; Ibid., vol. 369 (1940-41), cols. 509-510; Ibid., vol. 371 (1940-41), cols. 675-676.

²⁴ Sapper, "Wasted Talent," *The Spectator* 165 (September 1940), p. 294.

June 1941 Adam argued:

The British Army is wasting its man-power in this war almost as badly as it did in the last war. A man is posted to a Corps almost entirely on the demand of the moment and without any effort at personal selection by proper tests....

If we are to beat the Germans we must overhaul the whole system at once. The only way to obtain an efficient and contented Army is to place the right man,²⁵ as far as humanely possible, in the right place.

To remedy the problem, he recommended that the Army adopt psychological testing procedures. Ideally, he stressed, men should be enlisted into the Army and after undergoing testing at special depots be posted to Corps. This, though, was not considered immediately feasible. It would necessitate an amendment of the Army Act since no man could be deemed as enlisted until he had joined a Corps, and also the provision of extra training establishments between Recruiting Centres and Corps Training Centres. It was, however, proposed to try out general tests at Recruiting Centres, with further coordinated tests during Corps training. The whole operation was to be conducted by a War Office Directorate of Selection of Personnel, with an inspecting psychologist attached, and the Board of psychologists already constituted to act as technical advisers.²⁶

Of course "common sense" methods may have made some

²⁵WO 163/84, E.C.A.C./P(41)4.

²⁶Ibid.

headway in solving this problem, but the application of psychological techniques was strongly urged by Adam and he cited their adoption by other major Armies. The American Army, he noted, had carried out a great experiment of this kind during the First War and had started again in this. The German Army was employing 1,000 trained psychologists on testing and the Russians, it was understood, were also involved in this work.²⁷ Moreover, there was a feeling that this new system might prove beneficial to civil life. "The results of this experiment should be far reaching," noted Adam, "not only for this war, but for the future of the civilian population of this country."²⁸

On 9 June the E.C.A.C. considered these arguments, and in the knowledge that the Army had to be publicly seen to be making efforts to resolve the difficulties, agreed to the principle of applying psychological selection testing to the Army and to adopt the machinery and schemes put forward.²⁹ The full Army Council endorsed this on 17 June.³⁰ As Colonel Bernard Ungerson, former Chief Psychologist to the War Office, noted:

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ WO 163/84, Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(41)16., 9 June 1941.

³⁰ WO 163/50, Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(41)8., 17 June 1941.

The decision to invoke psychological assistance was based partly upon historical factors, and partly on the Army's wish to make it quite clear that it was making a really thorough effort to set its house in order.³¹

The new Directorate for the Selection of Personnel (D.S.P.) was immediately set up in the War Office and removed selection from the advisory to the executive sphere. It was headed by a soldier, Brigadier Kenneth McLean, succeeded by Brigadier Alick Buchanan Smith, and consisted of a team of soldiers and psychologists. This organization, it was felt, was essential if the new methods were to be found acceptable to the Army. The Directorate was advised by the Board of psychologists, assisted by psychiatrists from Army Medical Services, and Lieutenant-Colonel Jack Davies was appointed Inspector of Personnel Selection. At its peak the staff included nineteen psychologists and thirty-one officers who had had some psychological training, the psychologists being drawn largely from the Universities, the National Institute of Industrial Psychology and the Industrial Health Research Board.³² These specialists brought with them the fruits of over thirty years research in the field and ensured a certain crusading element within the movement for reformed selection. As Jack Davies recalls:

³¹ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 12.

³² Ibid., pp. 13-15; Vernon and Parry, p. 41; Charles S. Myers, "Selection of Army Personnel: Development of the DSP," *The Lancet* 2 (July-December 1942), pp. 591-592.

Everyone who took part in DSP's effort was trained centrally by the same group of people. It was not difficult in this climate to generate the feeling that this was something of a cause, attractive because at the same time it sought to make the Army more efficient and more careful of human values.

To the psychologists and psychiatrists involved in DSP the whole exercise was not only a great opportunity, but also a gesture of recognition to professional groups often treated with a good deal of scepticism. Psychologically-based procedures were being incorporated into the administrative system at a time of national crisis. Most of those who participated in the effort responded vigorously.³³

The D.S.P. immediately began work preparing job analyses, devising suitable tests and training those who would administer the testing procedure. In August 1941 Dr. J. C. Raven's Progressive Matrices, or Matrix Test, of general intelligence was introduced at the Recruiting Centres, and a minimum intelligence level laid down for certain Corps. However, only forty minutes were devoted to testing and the test conditions did not favour full cooperation since many new recruits were suspicious or bewildered. Others tried to secure rejection by falsifying results.³⁴ In July Army psychiatrists were given powers to recommend men for less skilled employment within the Pioneer Corps,³⁵ but this only served a limited corrective function rather than preventing misplacements before they occurred.

³³ Jack Davies, letter to the author, August 1989.

³⁴ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 21-22.

³⁵ Ahrenfeldt, p. 41.

In the meantime, in August the Select Committee on National Expenditure published its report on the allocation of manpower to the Army. It complained of the waste of resources in training men unlikely ever to become efficient soldiers in the Arm to which they had been posted, and noted:

The mechanisation of the Army demands a high standard of intelligence in personnel since valuable weapons and equipment are wasted if put into the hands of unintelligent and therefore unskilful users. The greatest care has been exercised to provide the Army with first class equipment of every kind, but it appears that sufficient corresponding attention has not been paid to the best methods of attaining an equal standard in the human component of the Army.³⁶

To add to this, in October 1941 the War Office received the final report of the Beveridge Committee on the use of skilled men in the Services. It accused the Army of wasting the very qualified skilled manpower it so urgently required. The Committee concluded that whilst the Ministry of Labour and National Service was calling upon industry to surrender skilled men to the Services, the Army had shown a "continuing failure to use men with engineering skills according to their skills, which has surprised us by its extent." It estimated that after two years of war less than half of the engineers joining the Army had been mustered in any engineering trade. The

³⁶ *Twenty Second Report for the Select Committee on National Expenditure*, (P.P., Reports: Committees, vol. 3, 1940-41), p. 3.

Committee could cite, amongst others, an electrical and mechanical engineer working as a Military Police cook, and a fitter with a marine engineering firm working as a "sanitary" man at a Royal Army Ordinance Corps depot.³⁷

As a result of these findings, the government took the drastic action of stopping all intakes of tradesmen to the Army in the majority of mechanical and electrical engineering trades; a ban not lifted until August 1942.³⁸

Both the Beveridge and the Select Committee Reports called for recruits to be sent to central depots on joining the Army and tested before posting to a Corps.³⁹

As a result of these two reports, and with a view to approaching the E.C.A.C., Adam asked the Director of Organization at the War Office to look into the practicability of urgently establishing common reception centres to test recruits. This he did in a paper written in conjunction with the Director of Military Training in October 1941. Although they agreed that these centres would have certain advantages, they argued that considerable selection was already being applied and the time was not yet appropriate for the scheme. Not only was it pointed out that the training centre organization had

³⁷ *Committee on Skilled Men in the Services. Second Report and a Memorandum by the War Office*, Cmd. 6339 (February 1942), pp. 13-14, 57-58.

³⁸ Parker, p. 154.

³⁹ *Twenty Second Report for the Select Committee on National Expenditure*, pp. 7, 11; *Committee on Skilled Men in the Services*, p. 18.

just been streamlined, but a major reorganization of the Field Army was in progress which involved using training units for re-training. Extra staff and accommodation would be required for up to 20,000 recruits, and existing training units have to be converted to a "post-basic" function. Training periods would have to be extended by four to six weeks on average, and increased movements of personnel would be unavoidable and undesirable, particularly during the winter months. There would also be considerable administrative upheaval. The control of postings would have to be centralized in the War Office and a separate "General Service" Records and Pay Office established.

Moreover, it was felt that if recruits were enlisted into the Army and centrally posted to a Corps by the War Office after testing, this would have an adverse effect on the regimental system. Not only would the regimental and geographical connections based upon feelings of local sentiment and tradition be harmed, but disadvantage would accrue from not introducing a recruit from his first day in the Army to the methods and atmosphere of individual regiments.⁴⁰

Adam castigated the paper as inaccurate and biased

⁴⁰ WO 32/10464, "The Selection of Army Class Intakes to make the most Economical Use of Man-power in the Army," Memorandum prepared by D. of O. in consultation with D.M.T., 26 October 1941.

against the proposal. The advantages of the scheme and certain reassurances about its implications had not been sufficiently stressed. He accepted a compromise would have to be found for the time being, but emphasized:

Both the Select Committee of the House of Commons and the Beveridge Committee have called attention to the problem. I took up my appointment as A.G. determined to remedy the situation and everything I have seen has confirmed me in my view.⁴¹

The decision of the War Office to publish a rejoinder to the Beveridge Report, defending the Army's record and outlining improvements being made, added to the urgency. The fact that the War Office's subsequent investigations suggested that the misuse of skill had been overstated did not diminish its impact.⁴² Adam ordered the paper to be rewritten.⁴³

On 26 November Adam submitted a revised paper to the E.C.A.C. and stressed:

The present system of posting men direct to Corps on first joining the Army has resulted in a failure to utilise properly the man-power allotted to the Army, and a misplacement of potential tradesmen. It is a source of discontent and invaliding, owing to men being in unsuitable

⁴¹ WO 32/10464, A.G. to D.A.G.(B)., 1 November 1941.

⁴² WO 163/88, Progress Report, as at 1 May 1942, on the Finding and Training of Tradesmen and Potential Tradesmen in the Army, Memorandum by A. G., E.C.A.C/P(42)67., 18 May 1942; Parker, p. 154.

⁴³ WO 32/10464, A.G. to D.A.G.(B)., 1 November 1941.

jobs.⁴⁴

The themes of the Select Committee and Beveridge Reports were reiterated, and it was recommended that in order to achieve the ideal new recruits should be enlisted for "General Service," so sidestepping any legal complications, and sent in the first instance to common reception centres. There they would undergo basic training and selection tests to determine the Corps or Arm for which they were most suitable. They would then be posted to carry out specific Corps training. Outlining the practical difficulties involved, it was noted that the scheme could not be implemented at once. It was recommended, though, that forthwith the D.S.P. should apply selection tests to recruits as soon as possible after arrival at Corps or Regimental Training Units, and this was already being done in some cases. On the basis of the tests misplaced men would be transferred to more suitable Arms.⁴⁵ On 28 November the E.C.A.C. agreed to the desirability of establishing common reception centres, and that the proposed modified scheme be put into effect.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ WO 163/86, "Common Reception Centres for Basic Training and Selection of Army Class Intake," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(41)106., 26 November 1941.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ WO 163/86, Minutes of the 36th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(41)36., 28 November 1941.

On arrival at the Corps or Regimental Training Units recruits underwent five tests; the Matrix Test and four further tests to measure verbal fluency, arithmetic, spatial perception and mechanical aptitude. Although they threw up many potential tradesmen and confirmed many as unsuitable for the jobs to which they had been allocated, there were a number of difficulties. Even if only a limited number of training units were tested some thousands of men had to be dealt with during their first month of training. The only way to cover the ground was to give a rapid course of instruction to officers nominated from the Corps themselves, which inevitably meant that expertise was limited. Furthermore, within these constraints, the scheme tended to operate most successfully when highlighting the best and the worst of the recruits. It was not so effective in sorting the remainder.⁴⁷ In January 1942 psychiatrists were given general powers to transfer and dispose of those who could be employed but displayed mental backwardness or instability,⁴⁸ but this again only served a wider corrective function rather than preventing misplacements before they occurred.

Events compelled an early decision on the ideal scheme. Experience showed that despite the testing at Recruiting Centres misplacement was still occurring. It was also

⁴⁷ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁸ Ahrenfeldt, p. 41.

clear that although the Ministry of Labour and National Service attempted to post men to Arms according to intelligence and aptitudes, they were unable to do so in balanced proportions.⁴⁹ Further evidence was also available on the implications for morale of poor selection. Quarterly Army morale reports, which were initiated by Adam early in 1942 on the basis of commanders' reports, censorship reports of soldiers' letters and other available sources,⁵⁰ attributed absence without leave in part to lack of interest in Army employment. It was found that a desire to be placed in an occupation in which the best use could be made of special skills or aptitudes was listed as a major preoccupation of soldiers,⁵¹ and that those employed in their civilian trades rarely went absent.⁵² As Adam later recalled:

I am convinced that conditions of work are more important than wages, and interest is all important. This was brought home to one constantly in the Army and was of course the main object of all Personnel Selection.⁵³

Over the winter months the difficulties holding back the

⁴⁹ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Adam VIII, chap. 5, pp. 2-4.

⁵¹ WO 163/51, Morale Report, February-May 1942, A.C./G(42)20., 12 June 1942.

⁵² WO 163/88, Morale Report, January 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942.

⁵³ Gen. Sir Ronald Forbes Adam [hereafter Adam (2)], "Lessons from the Army's Experience in Selection," *Psychology at Work* 1 (May 1948), p. 2.

establishment of common reception centres were tackled. In a paper to Adam at the end of March 1942, however, the Director of Organization still urged a degree of caution:

While such a system would be a novelty in the British Army, and its practicability would need demonstrating to the Army at large, it does not involve any new or unproven principles. Firms such as Vickers and the Westinghouse Company, already use tests of special aptitudes as well of intelligence, combined with a personal interview, in selecting their personnel. The broad principles on which the scheme is based can be taken as established in civil life, but a short experimental period is needed to adjust both the technical details and the administrative machinery to meet the particular needs of the Army, and to convince the Army of its practicability and benefit to the Service.⁵⁴

In May Adam placed before the E.C.A.C. a detailed scheme for the selection of Army Class intakes at common reception centres. An experiment would start in one training unit of each Arm to try out the procedure, but he recommended that the full programme should come into operation in July. The scheme was designed to minimize any practical difficulties. The reorganization of the Field Force having been completed, by a process of rationalization and reallocation it was found that existing training units, staff and administrative resources would suffice with only minor additions and temporary dislocation. Movement would be restricted to a minimum by either marrying these centres to local Corps

⁵⁴ WO 32/10464, "The Implementation of Basic Training and Selection Procedure for Army Class Intakes," Memorandum by D. of O., 28 March 1942.

Training Units, or by creating some establishments with both a reception and a Corps training function. The Matrix test would continue to be conducted at the time of the medical examination to enable the quality of recruits to be distributed between centres acting as feeders for certain Corps. Total training time would be extended initially, but it was hoped that by allocating men properly training times could be reduced in the long term.⁵⁵

Reassurances were also given that the regimental system would be preserved. Recruits would be posted according to the requirements of the Corps, but as far as possible in the same way as before, with due regard to the regional origins of personnel and the need to foster regimental spirit.⁵⁶ Indeed, in a letter to infantry colonels, Adam stressed that if a recruit was posted correctly from the outset, avoiding unnecessary and disheartening transfers later, regimental spirit and tradition would be enhanced.⁵⁷ On 8 May the E.C.A.C. approved the adoption of the General Service Selection

⁵⁵ WO 163/88, "Selection of Army Class Intakes and Introduction of Common Primary Training," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)58., 4 May 1942.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ WO 32/11519, letter from A.G. to Colonels of Regiments of Infantry of the Line, 28 May 1942.

Scheme.⁵⁸ After trials, it came into effect on 2 July.

In the first instance, a new recruit was enlisted into the General Service Corps and posted to a Primary Training Centre or Wing of a Regimental Training Unit. There he underwent six weeks of basic training and completed the battery of tests that had been in operation at Corps Training Centres since November 1941, an agility test being added for all recruits. Scores for each test were expressed as Selection Grades or S.G.s. These were summed to yield an overall intelligence score or Summed S.G. The tests were administered by teams of Sergeant Testers who had undergone one month's training by the D.S.P. They were selected from among serving soldiers with academic or professional qualifications and included many school teachers whose experience made them especially suitable for the work.

After completing a questionnaire which noted educational and employment record and spare-time activities, a recruit was interviewed by a specially trained Personnel Selection Officer (P.S.O.) who clarified details and consulted a man's interests and preferences. The P.S.O. then made a decision about a recruit's employment. He could either recommend a man for a trade, or make three "Training Recommendations" for broad types of work in

⁵⁸ WO 163/88, Minutes of the 58th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)19., 8 May 1942.

order of suitability. These ranged from "Driving" to "Signalling" to "Mobile and Combatant" to "Clerical". In making this decision he had to take into account a recruit's wishes, experience, temperamental characteristics and medical category, as well as observing the test minima for each "Training Recommendation" as prescribed by the completed job analyses. No recommendation was made, at this stage, for a particular Corps or regiment unless a man was a volunteer, or had a strong claim which made it desirable from the point of view of morale. During the interview potential officers were also noted, and those with very low test scores, or who for some other reason were regarded as unstable, were referred to psychiatrists for clinical interview. Having screened a recruit, the psychiatrist recommended either special employment or discharge.

The P.S.O.s were drawn from volunteer regimental officers. Ideally, from a technical viewpoint, psychologists would have filled this role. However, there were far too few available, and it was considered that the scheme would be more readily acceptable to the Army if interviews were conducted by serving soldiers. Trained by the D.S.P. for a month, preference was given to men whose background would help in the work. Again the teaching profession was well represented, but there were a number from industrial employment departments and social service organizations.

Once the "Training Recommendations" were completed by the P.S.O.s, they were forwarded to the War Office. The demand from the Corps was expressed in terms of these recommendations and divided into intelligence strata to ensure that each Corps received a distribution of men by general intelligence. Men were then posted on the basis of their individual recommendations, Summed S.G. and, as far as possible, territorial connections. This was done with the help of a special card cataloguing system known as the Hollerith Sorting Machine. A recruit was then sent on to Corps training accompanied by his "Training Recommendation" and a suggestion as to a specific job on the basis of that recommendation.⁵⁹

Between July 1942 and June 1945 some 700,000 recruits passed through the General Service Corps. 9% were chosen for training as tradesmen and 6% marked down as potential officers.⁶⁰ 14% were referred to psychiatrists.⁶¹ In all, it was estimated that ten hours were spent per individual in selection. Adam noted later:

My first lesson is the importance of making every man feel, on joining a large organisation that he is being treated as an individual and not as a

⁵⁹ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 39-44; D.S.P., pp. 455-457.

⁶⁰ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 47, 49-50.

⁶¹ Ahrenfeldt, p. 42.

pawn.⁶²

In 1943 it was also possible for the Army to institute special Army Selection Centres which reclassified misplaced men already serving, those who had been medically downgraded or those whose units had been disbanded. Between 1943 and 1944 over 30,000 men went through these centres.⁶³

Certainly, there was a considerable amount of statistical evidence to show that the selection scheme assisted in a more efficient use of the Army's manpower. Several follow-up studies revealed that from the beginning of their Army careers men were being more suitably employed than before. As examples, the training failure rate for drivers fell from between 16-20% to less than 3%, and of tradesmen from between 17-27% to under 7%.⁶⁴ Further tests revealed signallers were being selected with a failure rate of 7%, storeman 3% and clerks less than 2%.⁶⁵

There was also evidence of a resulting improvement in morale. One Army Commander commented:

Although their tests at first sight seem gibberish, one point stands out, the men

⁶² Adam (2), p. 2.

⁶³ Vernon and Parry, p. 49.

⁶⁴ D.S.P., p. 458.

⁶⁵ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 48-49.

themselves believe in them. Previously if a man fancied himself as a clerk, nothing would persuade him that he really ought to be a mechanic, but if the D.S.P. tells him so he seems willing to admit that he must have been wrong.

This of course has an enormous psychological effect on making men contented and keen at their work.⁶⁶

Tom Harrisson, founder of the Mass-Observation social survey organization and a serving soldier in the Reconnaissance Corps, recorded that the new procedure "introduced an intelligent, intelligible system, making men feel valued for their private abilities and personal peculiarities."⁶⁷ Brigadier J. R. Rees, who had become Chief Consulting Psychiatrist to the Army, noted that "the matching of men to suitable work is as valuable a means of psychiatric prophylaxis as anything that could well be advised."⁶⁸

Furthermore, many field officers fully endorsed the scheme and saw it as a step forward in improving the selection process. Amongst them, General Slim, Commander of the Fourteenth Army, wrote that in his view the system had proved exceedingly accurate as a means of assessing

⁶⁶ WO 163/52, Morale Report, November 1942-January 1943, A.C./G(43)10., 7 April 1943.

⁶⁷ Tom Harrisson, "The British Soldier: Changing Attitudes and Ideas," *The British Journal of Psychology* 35 (January 1945), p. 37.

⁶⁸ Brig. J. R. Rees, "Three Years of Military Psychiatry in the United Kingdom," *British Medical Journal* 1 (January-June 1943), p. 4.

mental and physical characteristics.⁶⁹

There were, though, factors which, according to some commentators, limited the technical effectiveness of the scheme. They were mainly due to the fact that the adoption of a science-based approach to the solution of an essentially human problem rested rather uneasily within the Army system. Philip Vernon and John Parry, both of whom were involved as psychologists in selection work for the Services, argued that whilst the huge size of the task to be done in the Army necessitated a large non-technical staff, the Army's reaction to the use of psychology in selection was not always cooperative:

Without belittling in any way the very fine work done by all types and grades of staff, it must be admitted that the organization did not always function smoothly. Psychologists suffered considerable frustration. They were commonly of lower rank than their non-technical colleagues. Policies which they advocated as scientifically sound were often rejected, and the methods they devised were often misapplied and misinterpreted by insufficiently trained personnel. Their training had perhaps predisposed them to seek what was best for the interests of the individuals with whom they had to deal, and they were less experienced in envisaging the broader needs of the Army as a whole. Again the fact that they were immured in headquarters (apart from occasional visits for inspections or for carrying out experimental investigations) tended to widen the gulf between the technical and practical aspects of selection.

The lot of the Sergeant Testers, they continued, was

⁶⁹WO 32/10924, "Notes on Infantry," by Lt.-Gen. W. J. Slim, n.d. [but 1945].

particularly deplorable:

Many were highly intelligent teachers and university graduates, but, except for a few brought to headquarters as research assistants and statisticians, they were restricted to routine application and scoring of tests under the command of PSO's whose educational and psychological qualifications were sometimes inferior to their own, and were liable to be put on to cutting of grass or other duties at the whim of any C.O. A quarter to a third of them eventually achieved commissions by the same route as other Army recruits, but not on the grounds of technical competence at their work.

They concluded with an overview:

Presumably the lesson to be drawn is that psychologists cannot expect a complex institution like the Army to accept novel procedures merely on scientific grounds, that gradual education and infiltration rather than the imposition of technically valid methods are needed.⁷⁰

Indeed, there was evidence that some elements within the Army remained sceptical about the scheme. In September 1942 the Cabinet appointed an Expert Committee to investigate and appraise the work of psychologists and psychiatrists in the Services, which collated the criticism. No doubt partly informed by the fact that selection was conducted in isolation from the bulk of the Army and thus assumed an air of mystery, the view was still held that dull men made the best soldiers and that psychological tests placed unintelligent men who would make good fighters in non-fighting jobs. The involvement of the psychiatrist was seen as a convenient escape route

⁷⁰Vernon and Parry, p. 42.

for those who were determined to evade military service.⁷¹ Churchill himself shared this distrust of psychologists and psychiatrists in the Services. In December 1942 he minuted the Lord President of the Council:

I am sure it would be sensible to restrict as much as possible the work of these gentlemen, who are capable of doing an enormous amount of harm with what may very easily degenerate into charlatanry.⁷²

Moreover, as the war developed the perceived adverse effects on the regimental system could be substantiated. There was a tendency for recruits to join Corps or regiments demoralized by their lack of identity, allegiance and incentive to work hard at Primary Training Centres.⁷³ In addition, and inevitably within the restrictions of supply and demand, the extent to which recruits were posted in accordance with their territorial connections was not always satisfactory, particularly to the Scots, Welsh and Irish. One survey of infantry intakes in February 1945 revealed that only 53% of men were posted to the regiment to which they were

⁷¹ Public Record Office, Cabinet Papers, CAB 98/25, Papers of the Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services, P.P.(42)2., 17 September 1942.

⁷² Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 4, *The Hinge of Fate* (London: Cassell, 1951; Hammonds worth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 815.

⁷³ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 50.

most closely connected.⁷⁴

In 1947 the published report of the Expert Committee noted that the advantages of personnel selection were many. Intellectual resources were put to the best use, men were no longer liable to be over or under employed, and thousands of men with predispositions to psychiatric disorder were screened out. "We have ample evidence," it concluded, "that the psychological methods of selection for training as employed by the Services are justified by training results."⁷⁵

In 1948 *Army Quarterly* commented:

During the Second World War few subjects caused more argument and engendered so much heat as the introduction of psychiatrists and psychologists into Army organization and procedure. The Army is an innately conservative body. The Infantry of the Line is perhaps the most die hard of all the arms and viewed the Personnel Selection Officers, their tests and their 'bags of tricks' with deep suspicion and mistrust. For years comment amongst regimental officers was caustic.⁷⁶

Towards the end of the war the authorities began to consider the application of testing to the post-war Army. In a paper to the Army Post-War Planning Sub-Committee on

⁷⁴ WO 32/11519, "Further Notes on G.S. Postings and Infantry Regimental Connections," by P.S.S.(Tech)., 28 May 1945.

⁷⁵ Privy Council Office, *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services* (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 21.

⁷⁶ Editorial, *Army Quarterly* 55 (January 1948), p. 146.

Selection Testing, the Director of Manpower Planning argued that the selection procedure should be continued, particularly if conscription remained, and that the General Service Corps provided an efficient and economical method of carrying this out. Testing at Recruiting Centres would only allow part of the procedure to be implemented, whilst testing during Corps training would, as he expressed it, "be putting the cart before the horse."⁷⁷

Whilst the War Office acknowledged the value of selection testing,⁷⁸ it was perhaps not surprising, in view of some of the doubts that lingered, that in seeking to cut back the post-war training organization, and without the pressures of wartime, it dispensed with the General Service Corps in 1948. Under the new scheme recruits were posted directly to Corps and regiments, with a preliminary selection test conducted at Recruiting Centres and the remainder of the procedure completed during Corps training. Transfers between Arms were to be the exception rather than the rule.⁷⁹ The primacy of the regimental system was thus restored, but the full benefits of psychological testing both to the Army and

⁷⁷ WO 32/11185, "Retention of the General Service Corps," Memorandum by D.M.P., 23 April 1944.

⁷⁸ WO 163/99, Minutes of the 255th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(46)11., 8 March 1946.

⁷⁹ WO 32/12454, "New Procedure for the Allocation of National Servicemen to Corps," Memorandum by D.M.P., 16 December 1947.

the individual could not be exploited.

During the course of the war the military authorities made significant changes to the way in which recruits were allocated to military occupations. Whilst in the pre-war Army little attempt was made at rational placement, an array of scientific selection techniques were introduced specifically designed to match the right man to the right job. Besides revolutionizing the utilization of manpower in the Army, these brought with them the institutionalized recognition that recruits had different individual capabilities, temperaments and job needs, and that quality was as important as quantity. As the Expert Committee recorded:

In modern warfare it is no longer a question of 'measuring Guardsmen by the yard.'⁸⁰

However, whilst it was perhaps a reflection of the suspicion that these techniques aroused in some quarters in the Army that the Brigade of Guards did not actually take part in the General Service Selection Scheme, it is also relevant to note that not only did the Report into the Army's Working Day in 1948 draw attention to the continuing misemployment of troops it found during its investigations,⁸¹ but that Trevor Royle's survey of the

⁸⁰ *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services*, p. 20.

⁸¹ WO 163/497, First Report. Army Working Day Investigating Team, 22 July 1948.

post-war Army reveals that one of the greatest gripes of national servicemen was the Army's misuse of civilian skills and abilities.⁸²

⁸² Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of their Lives. The National Service Experience 1945-63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), p. 31.

3. OFFICER SELECTION

Another problem that confronted the military authorities, and one linked to other rank selection, was the task of finding officers to lead the expanding Service. During the First World War the creation of the New Armies and the high officer casualty rate ensured that the Army was forced to cast its social net wider and deeper than ever before in the search for potential officers.¹ However, the officer corps had always been drawn, and continued to be drawn between the wars, from a narrow segment of society. Certainly, the aristocratic dominance had been lost as recruitment reflected the changing fortunes of social classes and occupational groups, but by 1939 the Army still relied on an exclusive upper and middle class group to fill its commissioned ranks, characterized almost entirely by those with a public school education.²

During the inter-war years the normal route to a commission was through either of the fee-paying cadet colleges at Sandhurst or Woolwich. A limited number of free places were reserved for rankers, but in the main cadets joined the colleges directly from school for the eighteen-month course. Selection was based on a

¹Keith Simpson, "The Officers," in *A Nation in Arms. A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, eds. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 87-88.

²C. B. Otley, "The Social Origins of British Army Officers," *Sociological Review* 18 (July 1970), p. 234.

candidate's performance in the Civil Service Commissioners' written examination, a headmaster's report and a short interview.³ Preferences for individual regiments were submitted to the colonels of the regiments concerned who vetted applicants and assessed their suitability.⁴

Between the wars over 80% of entrants to Sandhurst and Woolwich were from public schools, and over a third from ten major schools.⁵ This reflected a social exclusiveness based partly on the preparation that many of these schools gave for a career in the Army through the teaching of "army classes" and preparatory training in the Officer Training Corps (O.T.C.), but also on the professional assumption that the gentlemanly virtues of public service instilled by these institutions were a prerequisite for successful military leadership.⁶

It had a further foundation in terms of harsh economics. It was calculated that in 1937 the cost of putting a cadet through officer training, including fees and

³ Lt.-Col. C. F. Cox, "The Selection of Officers," *Army Quarterly* 58 (July 1949), p. 229.

⁴ Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 163/49, "System of Nomination by Colonels of Regiments of Horses Cavalry, Royal Armoured Corps, and Infantry of Candidates for First Appointments to Commissions in their Regiments," Memorandum by M.S., O.S.54., 15 April 1940.

⁵ C. B. Otley [hereafter Otley (2)], "Public School and Army," *New Society* 8 (November 1966), p. 756.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 755-756.

maintenance, was £455.⁷ In addition, the expenses incurred in taking commissioned rank were prohibitive except to those with a private income. In an average line regiment, it was estimated, a second lieutenant needed private means of between £60 and £100 a year. In 1938 officers were granted pay increases but this only brought in an extra £18 per annum.⁸

By the mid-1930s a career in the Army was proving less appealing to the established sources and there was a shortfall of new officers.⁹ In response the War Office began to consider modifying its selection methods and making the officer corps more accessible to other groups. In September 1937 Hore-Belisha suggested that all recruits should enter through the ranks, and after a year's service those selected as potential officers should undergo a shortened and free course at either Sandhurst or Woolwich.¹⁰ In December 1937 the Willington Committee, which had been set up to investigate the dearth of candidates for commissions, recommended that the Army make more use of the ranks and the secondary schools as sources of officers. It proposed more direct

⁷ WO 32/4461, Second Report of the Committee on the Supply of Army Officers, December 1937, p. 16.

⁸ Maj. G. F. Ellenberger, "The Army Officer after the Reforms of 1938," *Army Quarterly* 38 (April 1939), p. 108.

⁹ Gerald F. Spillman, "Manpower Problems in the British Army 1918-1939. The Balancing of Resources and Commitments," (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985), p. 121.

¹⁰ WO 32/4463, H.J.C. to C.I.G.S., 6 September 1937.

commissions and a hundred percent means tested scholarship scheme for the cadet colleges. "The more widely the net is spread," it noted, "the greater the chance of securing men of ability to officer the Army."¹¹ In August 1938 the Strathcona Committee, which had been appointed to look into the specific question of direct commissions from the ranks, recommended that forty such awards be granted each year.¹²

Although these proposals signified changing attitudes within the War Office to the question of officer recruitment, and Hore-Belisha was able to announce the introduction, in due course, of a scholarship system and more direct commissioning from the ranks,¹³ they were never ultimately followed through. The new trend in policy was opposed by the Military Members of the Army Council. General Sir Walter Kirke, the Director-General of the Territorial Army, represented their views when he warned that it was:

... important not to take any drastic measures to attract a new class of officer whose entry in any considerable numbers would probably have the effect of curtailing the existing supply from the

¹¹ WO 32/4461, Second Report of the Committee on the Supply of Army Officers, pp. 10, 53.

¹² WO 32/4544, Report of the Committee on Commissions from the Ranks, August 1938, p. 9.

¹³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 338 (1937-38), col. 3301.

superior classes.¹⁴

Moreover, the introduction of conscription in the Spring of 1939 with the Military Training Act, and the approach of war, effectively halted peacetime personnel reforms of the Regular Army.¹⁵ Indeed, the exclusivity of the officer corps remained intact. Of the 587 entrants to Sandhurst and 195 to Woolwich in 1939, 85% and 91% respectively were from public schools.¹⁶

On the outbreak of war the War Office decreed that no permanent commissions would be awarded. All would be emergency commissions for the duration of the conflict and normally granted into the rank of second lieutenant. Candidates would be trained at Officer Cadet Training Units (O.C.T.U.s). To meet immediate requirements for emergency officers it was notified that a number of direct commissions would be granted and that applications would be considered from holders of Certificate "B" gained in the university divisions of the O.T.C., those who had gained the Officer Qualification Certificate in the Territorial Army, and certain categories of ex-officers. To provide initial quotas for the O.C.T.U.s, applications would be considered from holders of Certificate "A" from the schools' O.T.C.s, and from

¹⁴Memorandum by D.G.T.A., 19 January 1938; quoted in Spillman, p. 207.

¹⁵Spillman, p. 207.

¹⁶Otley (2), p. 756.

candidates recommended by university authorities.¹⁷

However, it was laid down that when sufficient numbers had been obtained, all future officer requirements, apart from a number of specialists, would be met by selection from amongst men who had served a period in the ranks.¹⁸ Surprisingly, no formal records were kept relating to this decision. It was only two years later, when the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff desired to study the policy basis, that an attempt was made to reconstruct its origins. The view was held that this decision was a natural corollary of developments before 1939. Before the war, it was noted, there had been much talk of promotion of officers from within and the matter had attracted the attention of many politicians. The recommendations of the Willingdon Committee and the Strathcona Committee had demonstrated this process.¹⁹ Moreover, as General Brownrigg, the former Military Secretary, recalled, with the introduction of the Military Training Act, when every man called up had to serve in the ranks of the militia, it was only to be expected that apart from regular officers no one could get a commission without going

¹⁷ WO 216/86, "Enrolment of Candidates for Commissions in the Army to meet Initial Requirements on Mobilization," War Office, 20 September 1939.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ WO 216/86, M.S. to V.C.I.G.S., 22 August 1942; WO 216/86, D.A.G.(B). to V.C.I.G.S., 24 October 1942.

through the ranks.²⁰

On 11 October 1939 Hore-Belisha announced the introduction of the new policy emphasizing its egalitarianism:

In this Army the star is within every private soldier's reach. No one, however humble or exalted his birth, need be afraid that his military virtues will remain unrecognised. More important, no one, who wishes to serve in the Army need consider his status minimised by starting on the bottom rung of the ladder.²¹

By 21 October the immediate requirements for officers and O.C.T.U. cadets had been satisfied, and service in the ranks became the normal channel towards a commission.²²

William Shebbeare, the journalist who was serving in the Royal Armoured Corps, observed, though, that in this interim period the officer corps had begun to be constructed along familiar lines. A number of distinct elements emerged; pre-war regulars and territorials; university men with Certificate "B" from their O.T.C.s who were commissioned as soon as the war began; and public schoolboys of all ages who, he noted, almost wholly fed the O.C.T.U.s in the first six weeks of the

²⁰ WO 216/86, letter from Lt.-Gen. Sir Douglas Brownrigg to D. of O., 22 October 1942.

²¹ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 352 (1938-39), col. 347.

²² WO 216/86, "Termination of Arrangements for the Special Enrolment of Candidates for Commissions in the Army," War Office, n.d. [but 1939].

war, and who by virtue of having gained Certificate "A" from their school O.T.C.s at the age of sixteen became officer-cadets as soon as they joined up.²³

Under the officer selection system adopted after October a potential officer was selected for training, on the recommendation of his commanding officer,²⁴ by a senior regular officer, such as a divisional or district commander, after a short interview.²⁵ Selection was to be based on personality, powers of leadership and intelligence.²⁶ From April 1940 sponsorship of cadets by colonels of regiments ended, and to ensure a more even distribution of good officers throughout the Army new officers were posted to regiments according to their preferences, any territorial claims they had and their grading at O.C.T.U.s.²⁷

If an Army is what its leaders make it then it was crucial that competent men be selected for training as officers in sufficient numbers. Not only was this particularly important in view of the scope of the

²³ Captain X, [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), pp. 13-14.

²⁴ WO 216/86, "Enrolment of Candidates for Commissions in the Army to meet Initial Requirements on Mobilization."

²⁵ WO 277/12, "Manpower Problems", War Office Monograph compiled by Maj.-Gen. A. J. K. Pigott, 1949, p.30.

²⁶ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 356 (1939-40), col. 355.

²⁷ WO 163/49, O.S.54; WO 163/49, Notes of the Proceedings at a Meeting of the Army Council, A.C.M.(O.S.)22., 22 April 1940.

officer's job in modern mechanized warfare with its variety of tactics and weapons and complex administrative procedures, but the number of officers required by the Army during the war was quite unprecedented. Between 1939 and 1945 the ratio of officers to other ranks rose from 1 to 21 to 1 to 13.²⁸

During the first months of the war the Army seemed satisfied with its selection methods, the initial wave of volunteers and conscripts yielding what was seen as a rich supply of good officer material.²⁹ According to Shebbeare, during this period the O.C.T.U.s were still dominated by a limited section of the nation, namely public schoolboys who had merely to serve three months in the ranks before being reasonably sure of gaining a commission, and pre-war regular N.C.O.s. At least though, he continued, the worst type of public schoolboy could be relied upon to blot his copybook whilst serving in the ranks and thus never be recommended, whilst a number of highly skilled and professional N.C.O.s were given the chance to become worthy officers.³⁰

Yet hereafter, as the Army rapidly expanded, strategic commitments increased and the demand for officers grew,

²⁸ WO 277/16, "Morale," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. H. A. Sparrow, 1949, p. 21.

²⁹ WO 277/19, "Personnel Selection," War Office Monograph compiled by Col. B. Ungerson, 1953, p. 55.

³⁰ Captain X, p. 15.

so the War Office became concerned that the selection system was not producing enough potential officers of the requisite quality. Certainly, the fact that the Navy and the R.A.F. absorbed a high proportion of the most able recruits compounded the problem, but a number of important factors were highlighted.

Primarily, it was clear that not enough good quality candidates were being submitted for selection. One element in this was the reluctance of many able men in the ranks to come forward because of the financial liabilities associated with taking commissions. The financial sacrifices many had to make during officer training, the relatively low rates of pay of junior officers and the expenditure associated with officer status all acted as disincentives. As Henry Longhurst, the journalist and future Conservative M.P. who was serving in the Royal Artillery at the time, observed: "Potential officers are being kept in the ranks by the fear that they could not live, without a private income, as their regimental standards require."³¹

On becoming Adjutant-General in 1941 and thus assuming responsibility for the provision of officers, General Adam sought to remedy some of these problems. Under existing arrangements, and on the principle that soldiers

³¹ Henry Longhurst, "No Drinks or Smokes on an Officer's Pay," *The Sunday Express*, 13 April 1941, p. 5.



should receive pay only for the jobs they were doing, on entry to an O.C.T.U. cadets had to forego any acting rank they held and the extra pay that went with that. In a paper to the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) in October Adam proposed that paid acting rank should be retained. Not only did he note evidence that the Army was losing promising officer material because of financial difficulties, but he argued:

As things are, there is a distinct danger of unpleasant political repercussions. If the War Office is attacked on the score that some of the best men cannot get commissions because they cannot afford the financial sacrifices entailed in their training as officers, it will have no reply but to admit it.³²

There was some hesitancy on the part of the E.C.A.C., the view being held that as no acting ranks could be appointed as substitutes for personnel attending courses, so units would have to carry vacancies on their establishments for protracted periods.³³ However, the Air Ministry's successful negotiations with the Treasury over concessions for officers attending the Air Staff College persuaded the War Office to ask for similar arrangements with regard to staff officers and O.C.T.U. cadets.³⁴ In

³² WO 163/85, "Retention of Acting Rank by Officer Cadets," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(41)86.7., 19 October 1941.

³³ WO 163/85, Minutes of the 30th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(41)30., 24 October 1941.

³⁴ WO 163/87, "The Code of Wartime Promotion for Officers," Memorandum by P.U.S., E.C.A.C./P(42)1., 2 January 1942.

February 1942 Treasury approval was granted.³⁵

Adam also sought to increase the junior officer's income by speeding up promotion. Under the rules governing promotion in wartime it was laid down that a second lieutenant would normally be promoted to lieutenant after eighteen months, provided service was satisfactory. In a paper to the E.C.A.C. in June 1942 he proposed to reduce this to six months. Not only was it argued that this period of probation was too long in wartime and that the duties of the two ranks were the same, but the evidence of candidates being deterred from coming forward by financial considerations compelled such a reform. Indeed, it was noted that a second lieutenant, in the typical case of a married man with two children, was financially worse off than a company sergeant-major, in the case of a single man worse off even than a sergeant. Adam noted:

There is an urgent demand for a very large number of officers of the best type available; neither the numbers nor the quality are likely to be forthcoming unless financial conditions are improved materially and soon. Promotion to lieutenant gives an immediate increment of 14/- a week.³⁶

Although the E.C.A.C. were wary of the capital that could be made out of this in respect of other rank pay, they

³⁵ WO 163/87, Minutes of the 48th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)9., 27 February 1942.

³⁶ WO 163/89, "Time Promotion of Second Lieutenants," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)88., 16 June 1942.

agreed that some reduction should be made but were divided on the extent of reduction, some members preferring a longer period.³⁷ The Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg, came down though in favour of the six month period.³⁸ Treasury permission was granted and the new arrangements came into effect in the late Autumn.³⁹

Adam also engineered some economies in terms of the extra costs an officer was expected to meet on being commissioned. In a paper to the E.C.A.C. in September 1942 he noted:

It is still clear, from a mass of evidence, that the low rate of pay of a second-lieutenant, and the inevitable increased expenses that an officer's status involves, are holding back many suitable candidates, especially those with families or those who have to support their relatives.⁴⁰

On being commissioned, officers were expected to purchase their own uniforms. Although an allowance of £35 was available this was considered inadequate in view of rising clothing costs and the imposition of the purchase tax. In November it was announced that the grant was to

³⁷ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 64th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)25., 19 June 1942.

³⁸ WO 32/4543, P.J.G. to P.U.S., 30 June 1942.

³⁹ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 79th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)40., 2 October 1942.

⁴⁰ WO 163/89, "The Officer Situation," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)132., 28 September 1942.

be increased to £45.⁴¹

Officers were also expected to meet the mess subscriptions levied by individual officer's messes. These went towards the purchase of extra food to supplement the rations and the provision of other domestic luxuries. The charges could be high, varying from regiment to regiment depending on the standards to which each had become accustomed to live. One soldier related that he would be expected to contribute £1 a week, about a third of a subaltern's pay, if commissioned.⁴² In June 1943 a maximum standard charge of 1/6 a day was introduced.⁴³

Besides the financial disincentives involved in the taking of a commission, it was also true that there was a reluctance on the part of many commanding officers to recommend able men in the ranks for selection. From the earliest months of the war the importance of this matter was emphasized.⁴⁴ In May 1940 commanding officers were instructed that the failure to seek out, or ensure that junior commanders seek out, potential officers in the

⁴¹ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 385 (1942-43), col. 866.

⁴² Longhurst, p. 5.

⁴³ WO 163/52, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(43)19., June 1943.

⁴⁴ WO 163/48, Notes of Proceedings at a Meeting of the Army Council, A.C.M.(O.S.)11., 8 March 1940.

ranks was a "grave dereliction of duty."⁴⁵ However, it seemed that in many cases instructions went unheeded. Some commanding officers were unaware of the capabilities of men under their command, whilst others preferred to keep able men in the ranks for the sake of unit efficiency. A number of C.O.s, the majority of whom were regulars, chose to ignore men with obvious qualifications for commissioned rank on social grounds. As one soldier recorded:

The worst aspect of the whole business is the fact that you are at the mercy of your C.O. absolutely, whether you are ever given an opportunity of appearing before the Selection Board. Without his permission there is no appeal and no redress. And the prejudices of C.O.s are real, and unfortunately, only too prevalent.⁴⁶

This was a view that from the earliest months of the war had been represented to the War Office in Parliament.⁴⁷

In December 1941 Adam reiterated the importance of commanding officers searching out suitable men and instructed each C.O. to appoint a Unit Board to which the names of likely candidates would be reported and recorded

⁴⁵ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Bridgeman Papers, Bridgeman 3/7, Army Training Memorandum No. 32, War Office, May 1940, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Corporal, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 22 (November 1941), p. 410.

⁴⁷ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 358 (1939-40), col. 1060; Ibid., vol. 370 (1940-41), cols. 96-97; Ibid., vol. 377 (1941-42), cols. 2020-2021.

for inspection by senior officers.⁴⁸ Yet this seemed of little avail. During 1942 an investigation of units that were being disbanded revealed 178 potential officers in ten infantry battalions and 128 in one armoured brigade.⁴⁹ A quota system was tried out but the standard of candidates put forward was deemed deplorably low. Mass intelligence testing was also experimented with but was regarded as producing potential officers who lacked the necessary personal qualities.⁵⁰ In September 1942 Adam recorded:

The greatest hindrance is still the reluctance of the commanding officer to put up more than a few candidates, and his lack of knowledge of the material available.⁵¹

The following month a new initiative was presented by the Adjutant-General's department. In a paper to the E.C.A.C. it was argued that the present method of producing candidates was not providing the essential quantity or quality of officer material. A recent investigation had shown that out of 700 units surveyed 475 had put forward no candidates and 100 just one candidate each over the

⁴⁸ War Office, *Selection of Potential Officers. Their Preliminary Training and Commissioning 1941*, 31 December 1941.

⁴⁹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Adam Papers [hereafter Adam], Adam VIII, typescript narrative by Gen. Sir Ronald Adam on "Various Administrative Aspects of the Army during the Second World War," 1963, chap. 2, p. 11.

⁵⁰ WO 163/89, "Commissions: Regimental Nomination of Candidates to Commanding Officers," Memorandum by D.A.G.(B), E.C.A.C./P(42)140., 20 October 1942.

⁵¹ WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)132.

review period. Moreover, the majority of candidates that were put forward were from the worst trained units. It was essential, so the paper continued, to ascertain definitely whether or not sufficient potential officers of the requisite quality existed in the ranks to meet requirements. To this end, a system of regimental nomination of candidates was proposed.^{5 2}

This sociometric approach had been suggested by psychiatrists and psychologists in the Army as a means of making use of the knowledge that each group possessed of its own human resources.^{5 3} In a secret ballot each man in a company would write down on a slip of paper those within his own platoon, and others in other platoons, whom he thought fit to be leaders. The names of men who received an appreciable number of nominations would then be channelled up to the commanding officer for a decision to be taken on recommendation.

The results of tests conducted in Scottish Command, it was noted, were promising. In one unit, in which no candidates had been under consideration by the C.O. at the time, some twenty N.C.O.s and men had received strong to fair support and eleven had been accepted for officer training. In addition, the vast majority of officers and

^{5 2} WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)140.

^{5 3} Lt.-Col. J. D. Sutherland and Maj. G. A. Fitzpatrick, "Some Approaches to Group Problems in the British Army," *Group Psychotherapy* (New York, 1945), pp. 449-450.

men in the units tested had expressed their approval of the experiment. An extension of the scheme was requested, but it was carefully pointed out that this initiative did not in any way mean a diminution of the commanding officer's powers of veto:

It is important that this scheme should not be misrepresented as being a revolutionary innovation under which the future officers of the British Army are to be finally chosen by the direct vote of the soldiers. This is not the case. The experience and assistance of other ranks is to be enlisted for the purpose of finding and recommending candidates for the consideration of the commanding officer. The responsibility for the selection of officers remains upon the existing basis.⁵⁴

The E.C.A.C. took a dim view. There was general agreement that the scheme was liable to abuse; it would give the soldier the idea that he had some right to share in the selection of his officers, and would be seized upon by unscrupulous persons and distorted to the detriment of Army discipline.⁵⁵

The matter was put to the full Army Council. In support of the scheme it was submitted that its potential value could be measured against the fact that in order to meet requirements units had to produce officers at the rate of 0.4% of their strength per month. During the trial period

⁵⁴ WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)140.

⁵⁵ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 82nd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)43., 23 October 1942.

it had not only raised the submission rate in the selected units from the Scottish average of 0.1% to 8%, but improved the acceptance rate for officer training from 0.06% to 4%. The Army Council, though, remained unconvinced. Although the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Brooke, and the Civil Member, Arthur Henderson, dissented, there was general opposition. Not only were the concerns of the E.C.A.C. shared, but it was considered that even in the present Army "only a minority of men had the quality to appraise the basic requirements in an officer's character." Furthermore, it was asserted, once introduced it would be difficult if not impossible to drop, especially if superficially successful. The recommendation was made that quotas should be pursued by orthodox means.⁵⁶ In Adam's words, "the experiment was regarded with the gravest suspicion and as almost Bolshevik."⁵⁷

A solution to the problem presented itself the following year. By this stage the Army had the views of the trained Personnel Selection Officers (P.S.O.s) at the Primary Training Centres (P.T.C.s) who, as part of their remit of interviewing all new recruits before they were assigned to Corps, were expected to assist C.O.s by noting likely officer candidates for observation during Corps training.

⁵⁶ WO 163/51, Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(42)5., 28 October 1942.

⁵⁷ Adam VIII, chap. 2, p. 11.

From April an investigation was carried out, which came to be known as "Exercise Bypass,"⁵⁸ comparing the efficiency of P.S.O.s and C.O.s at nominating candidates. Not only did it confirm that the latter's judgements were uneven, but it was found that a large proportion of suitable candidates were earmarked at the P.T.C.s only to be turned down at the units. As a result of this, although commanding officers remained free to nominate, all those designated as having officer potential by the P.S.O.s were automatically submitted for selection.⁵⁹

Whilst initiatives were taken to improve the supply of candidates, the formal selection process itself was reformed. During the early years of the war there was increasing concern that candidates submitted for selection were being inadequately assessed. Unlike other rank selection which was largely concerned with measuring mental abilities, officer selection was more a matter of appraising personality. Yet no matter how shrewd the senior officer appointed to select potential officers, a proper judgement could not be made on the basis of a short interview. In contrast with the situation in the First World War, in the initial stages of the conflict there was less opportunity for selection on the basis of performance in battle. Moreover, as senior officers were untrained and appointed on an ad hoc basis, there was no

⁵⁸ Bernard Ungerson, interview with the author, December 1989.

⁵⁹ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 63.

way of knowing where the line was normally drawn between acceptance and rejection. One officer summed up the dilemma:

From discussions I have had with other officers and from my own experience I think the difficulty is to know just what standard, apart from technical qualifications, to aim at. We are all more or less agreed, I think, as to what type of candidate we should accept in time of peace, but in war one feels that the net may have to be spread a little wider. Just how much wider is the question which it is often a little difficult to answer. It is in fact a question of supply and demand, as to which the interviewing officer may be quite ignorant.⁶⁰

In the Summer of 1940 the War Office tried to solve this difficulty by replacing the senior officer's interview with a fifteen to twenty-minute interview before a Command Interview Board. Controlled by the local Command Headquarters, the Boards were headed by a permanent President, a full colonel drawn from the Reserve, assisted by regular commanding officers seconded from local units. The Presidents were chosen for their good judgement, and since they were to serve for long periods it was hoped that a greater expertise and uniformity would be injected into the system.⁶¹

However, the establishment of the Boards did little to improve matters. Not only was there scant attempt to

⁶⁰ WO 199/1644, letter from A. E. Percival, H.Q., 43rd (Wessex) Division to Brig. F. B. Humdall, B.G.S., Southern Command, 21 March 1940.

⁶¹ WO 277/12, Pigott, pp. 30-31.

bring the Presidents together to ensure common standards, but the Boards did not ameliorate the inherent weaknesses in the interview technique. In short, a candidate still stood or fell by the first impression he created.⁶² "An awesome business," wrote Henry Longhurst, "not improved by the thought that one's entire future may be dependant on the state of another man's liver."⁶³

Furthermore, it became evident that as the demand for officers outstripped the traditional sources, so the Boards were poorly placed to assess candidates who came to represent a wider cross-section of the nation. As Brigadier J. R. Rees, Consulting Psychiatrist to the Army, noted:

Since the supply of young men from the universities and public schools was drying up, the interviewing officers sometimes found themselves rather at sea since for purposes of rapid assessment they understood too little the background and outlook of many of the candidates whose civil life experience had been so completely different from anything of which they had previous knowledge.⁶⁴

Unsurprisingly, the Boards came to assume something of a reputation amongst candidates for allowing social bias to

⁶² WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 55; War Office Directorate for the Selection of Personnel [hereafter D.S.P.], "Personnel Selection in the Army," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Management Congress*, (Stockholm, 1947), vol. 1, p. 458.

⁶³ Henry Longhurst, *I Wouldn't Have Missed It* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1945), p. 34.

⁶⁴ John Rawlings Rees, *The Shaping of Psychiatry by War* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945), p. 64.

colour their judgements. One gunner wrote of his experiences:

I have recently had interviews with the Command and the Technical Boards, and on each occasion I was made to feel that my residence at a couple of English universities doesn't quite make up for the fact that my old headmaster didn't attend the Headmasters' Conference.⁶⁵

In January 1941 it was estimated that some 25-30% of those selected for officer training by the Boards were being rejected by the O.C.T.U.s.⁶⁶

As for the social composition of the officer corps at this time, it was certainly widening. In March 1941 it was noted that whilst 26% of newly commissioned officers had a public school background, 74% had been educated at either Grammar, Council, Board or Technical schools.⁶⁷ Yet these statistics concealed a system of preferences. William Shebbeare observed that, unable to receive enough of the dashing young public schoolboys to whom they were accustomed, the Command Interview Boards chose for a long time to select in their stead men who superficially resembled them.⁶⁸ This was a view corroborated by the

⁶⁵ Gunner, R.A., letter to the editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 22 (October 1941), p. 377.

⁶⁶ WO 216/61, Training of Officers. Report of a Meeting, 29 January 1941.

⁶⁷ WO 216/86, "Method of Selecting Officers for the British Army," Memorandum by A.G., 8 March 1941.

⁶⁸ Captain X, p. 57.

Australian author Alan Wood who was serving in the Royal Artillery. He wrote of what he considered to be the wartime Army's imitation of the Regular Army. In reference to the military representative's judgement of potential officers, he noted:

Nowadays he cannot hope to find Eton and Oxford among the recruits. So he acts on the principle of accepting the second best. If he cannot get Eton, he will get a good Grammar School. If he cannot have Oxford, he will get a graduate of a provincial University. If he cannot get the genuine ex-public-school boy,⁶⁹ he will get the best imitation in the market.

On becoming Adjutant-General, Adam recalled that he was keenly aware of the deficiencies in officer selection and the implications both for military efficiency and morale:

When I went to the War Office in 1941, I had already realised from the failure rate at O.C.T.U's in my command that the system was a failure. I found that the average failure rate was 25% and at one O.C.T.U. 50%. We could not tolerate this waste of valuable training establishments, and cadets were oppressed by the knowledge that at least a quarter would fail. In order to find out the reasons, I invited three good presidents of boards to sit together to examine candidates in my presence. They could each ask the candidates as many questions as they wished, and then submit on a piece of paper their opinion of the candidate, which I saw on its way to the recording officer. The diversity of views of three experienced officers after an interview confirmed my opinion that we must devise a new procedure.

A further confirmation was the knowledge that the candidates did not consider that the board gave them a fair chance, and consequently there

⁶⁹ Boomerang [Alan Wood], *Bless 'Em All. An Analysis of the Morale, Efficiency and Leadership of the British Army* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1942), p. 52.

was a decline in volunteers for commissions.⁷⁰

It was clear that the high failure rate had operational implications. The shortfall of 25% in the output of the O.C.T.U.s from the 600 which was their monthly target meant that the War Office was unable to provide units in the Middle East and India with their requirements, let alone those at home.⁷¹

Moreover, not only were there numerous complaints from O.C.T.U.s and receiving units overseas over the quality of new officer material, but the cumulative effect of poor selection was evident in the number of officers who proved unable to shoulder the burdens of leadership. As Brigadier Rees recounted:

...the psychiatric breakdown rate among officers was high. A considerable number of officers had been brought back from the reserve but were really unfit. Some of them had even been in receipt of disability pensions for neurosis since the last war. Many had clearly been inefficient on psychiatric grounds for quite a long time before they were sent for psychiatric interview. Equally, quite a number of men newly commissioned from the ranks had a history of psychopathy which should have excluded them. It was evident that a neurotic breakdown had often occurred because the man was unable to carry the extra responsibility that came with his increase in rank, while his shortcomings in ability and personality might still have been compatible with efficient service

⁷⁰ Adam VIII, chap. 2, p. 7.

⁷¹ Brig. F. H. Vinden, "The Introduction of War Office Selection Boards in the British Army: A Personal Recollection," in *War and Society. A Yearbook of Military History*, vol. 2, eds. Brian Bond and Ian Roy (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 120.

in the ranks.⁷²

Concern within the War Office was set against a backdrop of growing civil unease over the whole question of officer selection. By the middle of 1941 as many as thirty parliamentary questions a week were being asked on the subject,⁷³ and the Select Committee on National Expenditure was inquiring into officer selection as part of its general investigation into allocation of manpower to the Army.

On 9 June 1941 the E.C.A.C. had taken the decision to create the Directorate for Selection of Personnel and adopt psychological selection methods for other ranks. It was thus only logical that their extension to officer candidates should be considered.⁷⁴ Indeed, at a meeting in the War Office at the end of June to discuss the institution of psychological testing for the Army as a whole, Adam stated that he was not satisfied with the existing officer selection methods.⁷⁵ There had, though, been little scientific study in Britain of the selection of high grade executives and administrators, and unlike other rank selection there was not a fund of civilian

⁷²Rees, p. 64.

⁷³Ben S. Morris, "Officer Selection in the British Army 1942-1945," *Occupational Psychology* 23 (October 1949), p. 220.

⁷⁴R. H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 53.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 54.

experience on which to draw.⁷⁶

However, it was known that the German Army had developed a system for the selection of specialists and potential officers. Brigadier Rees had received a complete record of their procedure through the United States which was still neutral.⁷⁷ Under the German system an officer candidate spent two or three days at a psychological centre undergoing a number of intelligence and personality tests. The staff consisted of a trained psychologist, psychiatrist and a military representative. At a conference at the end of the selection period, the observers presented a report on each candidate to the president of the unit, a regular officer, who had ultimate responsibility for deciding their fate.⁷⁸ With the prestige of the Germans at its zenith at this stage of the war, Adam asked for a system, possibly on the German model, to be developed.⁷⁹ In August the Select Committee gave its blessing to this approach by recommending that psychological tests be utilized as an aid to officer selection.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Vinden, p. 121.

⁷⁸ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 56.

⁷⁹ Ahrenfeldt, p. 54.

⁸⁰ *Twenty Second Report for the Select Committee on National Expenditure*, (P.P., Reports: Committees, vol. 3, 1940-41), p. 11.

In the meantime, it was suggested that some improvement in the existing system might be introduced. In the late Summer the Command Interview Boards were removed from command control and placed directly under the War Office. Conferences were held to study the methods of the Presidents, and attempts were made to interest them in standardized interview techniques and the supplementary use of intelligence tests.⁸¹

Preliminary experiments on a new officer selection system did, however, proceed. Two psychiatrists, Captain Eric Wittkower and Lieutenant-Colonel Fergusson Roger, who had already been conducting unofficial investigations in Professor F. A. E. Crew's laboratories at Edinburgh University, arranged to undertake research at the Scottish Company Commander's School. Their experiments on the validity of psychological methods of assessing officer qualities gave encouraging results when set against the more traditional military assessment. In one brief survey the psychiatrist's appraisal of the officers under review correlated in 80% of cases with the views of the commandant, who had observed the control group for several weeks.⁸² In a further survey agreement was reached in 90% of cases.⁸³

⁸¹WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 56.

⁸²WO 32/9681, D.S.P. to A.G., 11 October 1941.

⁸³Ahrenfeldt, p. 56.

At a conference in Edinburgh in December 1941 the psychological techniques used were demonstrated to Adam and the Director for Selection of Personnel, Brigadier McLean, and the decision was taken to establish an experimental board within the city.⁸⁴ Edinburgh University consented to the use of its facilities and grounds at King's Buildings, and the trial enjoyed the full support of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Scottish Command, General Thorne, who as a former military attaché had first-hand experience of German officer selection methods.⁸⁵

No.1 War Office Selection Board was formed in January 1942 and included on its staff Major W. R. Bion, a psychiatrist from Harley Street, Captain Eric Trist, who held doctorates in psychology from universities in both Britain and the United States, Major Jock Sutherland, a psychiatrist and psychologist from Edinburgh University, together with a number of experienced soldiers.⁸⁶ Some of the more bizarre German tests were considered unsuitable for the British Army. One such technique involved the secret filming of candidates' facial contortions as they were subjected to progressive electric shocks.⁸⁷ However, from the beginning the Board adhered to the German plan

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁸⁵ Vinden, p. 123.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 121-122.

in which psychologists, psychiatrists and military experts shared the vetting of candidates. The staff immediately set about honing the testing procedures and by February the Board was assessing candidates.⁸⁸

Ten batches of potential officers having been appraised, Adam returned to Edinburgh to watch the procedure. Brigadier Vinden, a member of his staff, recounted:

All participated with the board staff and were surprised at what they themselves discovered independently about the personality of the candidates which coincided with the board's decisions. Thereupon, General Adam ordered me to establish the system throughout Great Britain as fast as possible.⁸⁹

From the Spring of 1942 all the Command Interview Boards were replaced by new War Office Selection Boards (W.O.S.B.s). With the expansion of the Army in India and the heavier than anticipated officer demands from other overseas theatres during the year, this took on a greater urgency. By the end of September there were sixteen in operation.⁹⁰

The new Boards operated under the control of the Directorate for Selection of Personnel, but a special W.O.S.B. Research and Training Centre was evolved from the experimental Board. This incorporated a team of

⁸⁸ Ahrenfeldt, p. 57.

⁸⁹ Vinden, p. 126.

⁹⁰ WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)132.

expert psychologists and psychiatrists, with Trist as Senior Psychologist and Sutherland as Senior Psychiatrist, to develop procedures, train personnel and provide follow-up studies. According to Jack Davies, Inspector of Personnel Selection at the time, a number of considerations underpinned the evolution of the W.O.S.B. technique:

Obviously one objective was to develop a procedure which assessed suitability better than the old Interview Boards. Equally important was to inaugurate a system in which the Army at all levels could have confidence. Still more important was the aim of getting more people in the ranks to aspire to commissions and to get rid of any residual beliefs that commissions were only for the 'posh' or for the Sandhurst Stereotype. The WOSBs⁹¹ were informed by a meritocratic philosophy.⁹¹

There was, he recalls, also a feeling that it could be of some positive benefit to civil life:

The WOSB procedure was highly innovative and I should say that its possibilities caught the imagination of wider groups, not merely among those close to its development in the Army. There was a stream of visitors from public and private institutions to see the procedure and much discussion about the modifications that might be needed to adapt it to the needs of civilian institutions.⁹²

The exact procedure varied from one W.O.S.B. to another in order to discourage cramming, but all incorporated the same basic features. Candidates reported to the Boards,

⁹¹ Jack Davies, letter to the author, August 1988.

⁹² Ibid., July 1992.

which were usually situated in large country houses, in batches of thirty or forty for a three-day selection process. The staff consisted of a President and Deputy President who were senior regular officers, two Military Testing Officers (M.T.O.s) who were usually line officers of some experience, a psychiatrist and a psychologist or a Sergeant Tester trained in psychological techniques.⁹³ Those attending the Boards were required to conceal their badges of rank and were known only as numbers.

After completing a detailed questionnaire, the candidates underwent a number of individual intelligence and personality tests. The latter consisted of a Word Association Test and Murray's Thematic Apperception Test. These were administered and interpreted by the psychological staff.⁹⁴

Candidates also participated in a number of group tests conducted by the M.T.O.s. When the W.O.S.B.s were first organized it was believed by some of the senior officers concerned that all that was necessary to ensure adequate selection was an intelligence test and a psychiatric interview. In fact, it was conceived that the non-technical members of the Board merely provided cover for the psychiatrist.⁹⁵ The tests administered by the M.T.O.s

⁹³ D.S.P., p. 459.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 459-460.

⁹⁵ Rees, pp. 66-67.

initially consisted of a group discussion, an outdoor exercise which was little more than a "tactical exercise without troops," and a physical test in which candidates were expected to tackle an organizational problem after half an hour's P.T.⁹⁶

Yet it was quickly realized that practical group tests had a useful role in assessing leadership through the relationship between the leader and the led. The M.T.O.s tests thus became progressively less purely military in character and more organized on a definite plan according to psychological principles. Designed to assess candidates' initiative, powers of cooperation and other social qualities, the most notable initiative was perhaps the development of the "Leaderless Group Test" by Major Bion, during which leaderless groups of candidates were observed as they tried to solve simple practical problems.⁹⁷

At the outset of the scheme all candidates were also interviewed by the psychiatrist. This provided a broad overview of personality and detected any unrecognized potential and strengths or underlying psychopathic or neurotic tendencies. Moreover, the psychiatrist acted as a technical adviser to the Board and was given the responsibility of maintaining and

⁹⁶WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 59-60.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 60-61.

furthering a scientific attitude towards selection.⁹⁸

After candidates had undergone a further interview with the President, a meeting of the Board members was convened at which their judgements were compared and discussed. The various character traits of each candidate were recorded and agreed ratings given to each individual trait.⁹⁹ As trained Sergeant Testers, who generally performed the psychological role at the Boards, did not attend the conference, the psychiatrist came to represent the qualified technical opinion.¹⁰⁰ Since it was considered essential that ultimate responsibility for officer selection should lie with the military organization, rather than its technical advisers, if the new procedure was to prove acceptable to the Army, the final decision on a candidate was taken by the President.¹⁰¹ Those that satisfied the Boards were sent on to O.C.T.U.s.

During the course of the war some 140,000 candidates passed through the W.O.S.B.s, of whom approximately

⁹⁸ Public Record Office, Cabinet Papers [hereafter CAB], CAB 98/26, "The Role and Status of the Psychiatrist in the War Office Selection Boards," Revised Memorandum by Brig. J. R. Rees, P.P.(43)37., 4 October 1943.

⁹⁹ D.S.P., p. 460.

¹⁰⁰ Philip Vernon and John B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces* (London: University of London Press, 1949), pp. 54, 56.

¹⁰¹ D.S.P., p. 460; Brig. G. N. Tuck, "The Army's Use of Psychology during the War," *Occupational Psychology* 20 (July 1946), p. 116.

60,000 were recommended for officer training.¹⁰² Candidates who were rejected had the right to reassessment by another Board.¹⁰³ During 1943, after consultation with Dr. Kurt Hahn, the headmaster of Gordonstoun School and inspirer of the outward bound concept, a Highland Fieldcraft Centre was established with the aim of developing young soldiers of potential rejected by the Boards for lack of maturity.¹⁰⁴ Arrangements were also made for officers suffering from certain psychiatric disabilities to be assessed at a designated W.O.S.B. for redeployment.¹⁰⁵ In January 1943 the Army began to grant permanent regular commissions to selected officers, and with only minor modifications the W.O.S.B. procedure was adopted.¹⁰⁶

Macdonald Hastings, writing in *Picture Post*, argued that the introduction of the new system of officer selection was one of the most progressive initiatives that had been taken since war began: "If successful it will put an end to all talk of 'class favouritism,' and should lead to a high increase in efficiency."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Vernon and Parry, p. 53.

¹⁰³ WO 277/19, Ungerson, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ Adam VIII, chap. 2, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ WO 163/52, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(43)21., July 1943.

¹⁰⁶ WO 277/19, Ungerson, pp. 65-66.

¹⁰⁷ Macdonald Hastings, "A New Way to Choose Army Officers," *Picture Post*, 19 September 1942, p. 16.

Certainly, there was a good deal of evidence to confirm that the introduction of the W.O.S.B. procedure improved the efficiency of officer selection. Between May and September 1942, whilst the old and new Boards were working simultaneously, the opportunity was taken to compare the two systems by following up potential officers at O.C.T.U.s. Of those selected by the old methods, 21.1% were rated above average, 36.5% below average and 12.5% markedly below average. In spite of passing as great a proportion of the total candidates as the old Boards, the corresponding figures of those selected by the W.O.S.B.s were 34.5%, 25.2% and 7.9%.¹⁰⁸

There was also evidence to suggest that a greater confidence and sense of fairness was brought to the officer selection process. Regular anonymous questionnaires revealed that an overwhelming proportion of both accepted and rejected candidates were satisfied with the procedure.¹⁰⁹ In September 1942 Adam reported:

These Boards are having an extremely good effect throughout the Army. The candidates realise that they have been exhaustively tested over a reasonable period of time, by a staff of officers who have been specially trained to seek a common standard.

Even those who fail feel that they have been given a fair deal and there have been remarkably

¹⁰⁸ CAB 98/28, "Follow-Up of W.O.S.B. Cadets at O.C.T.U. Progress Report June 1943," R.T.C. Technical Memorandum No.4, P.P.(S.C.)(43)36., 19 August 1943.

¹⁰⁹ Morris, p. 226.

few protests at the decisions of these Boards.

There is consequently a growing feeling of confidence in these Boards, which was lacking under the old system, and in Commands in which the Boards have been working for some time, the number of candidates has appreciably increased.¹¹⁰

Indeed, it was argued that the Boards played a leading role in increasing the supply of material which rose by 65% between May and September 1942.¹¹¹ Brigadier Rees recorded:

In such serious affairs as the Selection of Officers it is, of course, important that justice should not only be done but that it should appear to be done. The scientific basis of the New procedure ensures both these objects.¹¹²

Interestingly, it was noted that complaints about rejections reaching the War Office tended to be mainly confined to public school candidates.¹¹³

It was further calculated that the increased supply of candidates, combined with more efficient selection, resulted in two and a half times more above average candidates being sent to O.C.T.U.s each month during the

¹¹⁰ WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)132.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² CAB 98/26, "The Role and Status of the Psychiatrist in the War Office Selection Boards," Revised Memorandum by Brig. J. R. Rees, P.P.(43)37., 4 October 1943.

¹¹³ CAB 98/26, Minutes of a Meeting of the Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services, P.P.(43)14th Meeting., 14 August 1943.

review period than previously.¹¹⁴ Indeed, during a time in which it was generally conceded that the quality of Army intakes declined, between 1943 and 1945 the rejection rate at O.C.T.U.s fell to 8%.¹¹⁵

The very heavy demand for officers in 1942 was thus largely met,¹¹⁶ and although there was always a shortage of regimental officers fit for active service in a front-line unit, the selection methods succeeded in providing the Army with enough officers to contest the war to its conclusion.¹¹⁷ The quality of officers also seemed to prove acceptable. In a follow-up study of the performance of W.O.S.B. selected officers in the Mediterranean Campaign and of infantry units in the British Liberation Army, 76% proved to be giving completely satisfactory service in the opinion of their commanding officers.¹¹⁸

There were though, according to some observers, factors which undermined the technical effectiveness of the scheme. Again it was clear that the adoption of modern scientific methodology to solve an essentially human problem rested rather uneasily within the Army system. Service psychologists, Philip Vernon and John Parry,

¹¹⁴CAB 98/28, P.P.(S.C.)(43)36.

¹¹⁵Morris, p. 225.

¹¹⁶CAB 98/26, P.P.(43)37.

¹¹⁷WO 277/12, Pigott, pp. 32, 38.

¹¹⁸Morris, p. 224.

wrote of what they considered to be the organizational limitations placed on the scientific advisers:

Though the aim was to educate the Army gradually into accepting scientific methods, the compromise eventually achieved showed considerable technical defects. Psychiatrists, psychologists and M.T.O.s were technical advisers to the president; and each president could run his board as he wished, with as much or as little reference to the technicians as he wished, subject only to the controlling authority of the Director for Selection of Personnel, himself a professional soldier. Hence, the president, representing the Army, was responsible for the final decisions; hence also a major part was played by the M.T.O.s who were regimental officers. This meant considerable dependence on the subjective judgement of a single man, and considerable divergence between different boards.¹¹⁹

The W.O.S.B. Research and Training Centre revealed a more subtle limitation. After a detailed study of a designated Board in 1945, it was found that because the President had the final decision, the opinions of the advisers were greatly affected, both consciously and unconsciously, by the President's personality.¹²⁰

Moreover, from the outset the War Office realized that a good deal of hostility to the W.O.S.B. procedure would be encountered from the Army. This perhaps explains why the matter was never put before the Army Council. In fact, Churchill himself minuted the Secretary of State that he

¹¹⁹ Vernon and Parry, p. 55.

¹²⁰ University of Edinburgh, Department of Psychology, Private Papers of Dr. B. Semeonoff, "First Report: A Descriptive Introduction," R.T.C. Report No. 160, Developmental Programme at No. 14. W.O.S.B., 16 June 1946.

considered that the commanding officer was the best judge of potential officers, and that if he was not a good judge he was scarcely fit for his position.^{1 2 1}

Efforts were made to "sell" selection. In a letter to Home Commands in October 1942, every commanding officer was instructed to act as a visiting member of a Board at least once,^{1 2 2} and Brigadier Vinden recalled that he invited anyone whom he heard through the grape-vine as being critical, to witness the new methods at first hand.^{1 2 3}

Yet powerful elements remained unconvinced. The Expert Committee, set up by the Cabinet in September 1942 to inquire into the work of psychologists and psychiatrists in the Services, acted as the focal point for criticism. Of particular significance in this respect was the role of the psychiatrist. Not only was it stressed by General Paget, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, amongst other senior officers, that the psychiatrist's interview created an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust and upset the candidates by encroaching on personal affairs, but that psychiatrists were dominating the selection

^{1 2 1} WO 259/75, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, Serial No. M.608/2., 14 December 1942.

^{1 2 2} Adam V/1, letter from the War Office to General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, Home Commands, 31 October 1942; cited in A.G.'s Letter to Corps District, Divisional, A.A. Group, District and Area Commanders, Serial No. 2, January 1943, p. 13.

^{1 2 3} Vinden, p. 127.

procedure by virtue of their technical knowledge and ability to present evidence. Some of the psychiatrists, it was pointed out, could not appreciate what was required of an officer because they had little or no experience of Army life and traditions, and candidates were being rejected who were otherwise considered suitable. Indeed, it was argued that the psychiatrists could be dropped from the procedure without any loss of efficiency to the Boards.¹²⁴ Brigadier Rees countered to the Committee:

The slightest reflection shows that this criticism is directed not so much against the psychiatrist as against the scientific methods which he employs. The critics object to the fact that a man, who, on everyday standards of judgment appears suitable to be an officer, should be recommended for rejection by the psychiatrist. They fail to pay attention to the fact that it is just because the W.O.S.Bs. employ scientific methods which penetrate surface appearances that good results are obtained.¹²⁵

Furthermore, he noted, to eliminate the work of the psychiatrists and the scientific technique they employed would be absurd: "To do so would be to return without any adequate reason to the conditions operating under the old

¹²⁴ CAB 98/29, Minutes of a Meeting of the Ministerial Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services, P.P.(43)1st Meeting, 15 July 1943; CAB 98/26, Minutes of a Meeting of the Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services, P.P.(43)16th Meeting, 11 September 1943; CAB 98/26, "Criticism of Psychiatrists at War Office Selection Boards," Memorandum by Brig. H. A. Sandiford in consultation with Brig. J. R. Rees and Brig. A. D. Buchanan Smith, P.P.(43)39., 7 October 1943.

¹²⁵ CAB 98/26, P.P.(43)37.

procedure."¹²⁶

Although the Expert Committee refuted the complaints placed before it,¹²⁷ the Secretary of State succumbed to the critics. In April 1943 psychiatrists at the W.O.S.B.s were instructed that the number of interview cases should comprise no more than half of the candidates. For some time the shortage of trained psychiatrists had meant that not every candidate had been examined, but this formal limitation, it was argued, compounded the problem. According to Rees, the instruction had two effects:

It altered the status of the psychiatrist from his position as medical examiner of all candidates and allotted to him instead his traditional role of alienist.

By encouraging the misconception that the psychiatrist only saw 'abnormals' the anxiety of candidates with regard to psychiatric examination was increased.¹²⁸

Moreover, it was contended, this policy resulted in a considerable proportion of candidates being assessed without an effective third opinion.¹²⁹

This was accompanied by a further instruction in early 1943 that no questions on sex or religion should be asked

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ CAB 98/26, P.P.(43)39; CAB 98/29, "The Work of Psychiatrists on War Office Selection Boards," Report by the Expert Committee, P.P.M.(44)1., 9 February 1944.

¹²⁸ CAB 98/26, P.P.(43)37.

¹²⁹ Ahrenfeldt, p. 64.

by the psychiatrist during the interview. Robert Ahrenfeldt, former Deputy Assistant Director of Army Psychiatry, noted:

It should, however, have been clear to all but the most prejudiced, that it was of the greatest importance for psychiatrists, as medical men required to assess emotional maturity and stability of personality, to enquire in appropriate cases into so significant an aspect of the human mind, behaviour and social adaptation as sexual adjustment. Similarly, it should have been obvious that, in dealing with religion, psychiatrists were not concerned with a candidate's views on transubstantiation or parthenogenesis, that they might advise his rejection on grounds of heresy: rather were they attempting a fundamentally sociological evaluation of a man's attitude to established authority, and the manner in which he reconciled his own views and convictions with those of other sections of the community.¹³⁰

It was perhaps unsurprising that in view of the criticisms and the shortage of trained personnel, the psychiatric examination was withdrawn altogether from the Regular Commissions Boards (R.C.B.s) in August. One Major-General in charge of a R.C.B. wrote:

Having sat as president on these Boards for the past nine months, both with and without the assistance of a psychiatrist, I am of the opinion that this order was a mistake....

The presence of a psychiatrist as a member of these Boards is a definite asset.¹³¹

Despite this acknowledgment of the value of a qualified

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

¹³¹ CAB 98/26, "The Work of Psychiatrists on War Office Selection Boards," Note by the Joint Secretaries, P.P.(43)45., 4 November 1943.

medical opinion in selection, the views of Lieutenant-General Sir Giffard Martel, former Commandant of the Royal Armoured Corps, although extreme, did perhaps reflect those held in certain quarters during the war:

The supporters of the introduction of the psychiatrist claim that they had success because after their introduction the proportion of failures at O.C.T.U. was considerably reduced. This proves nothing. It is far better to send a large number of men with fine characters to the O.C.T.U., even though some of them would fail, than to send the more cute and brainy types that would pass through any O.C.T.U., but not command the respect of the men. The supporters of the new form of W.O.S.B.Y. also claim that the thousands of officers whom they produced fought well and won the war. This of course is quite true but it is a negative argument. Many of us are quite convinced that we would have had even more success in some units if greater weight had been put on character and less on the cute type of brain in the selection of their officers....

It seems well that the country should know that a large section of the Army does not consider that this side of the work of the psychiatrist has been successful. Let us keep the psychiatrist on this valuable work of sorting out the men in the mass, but let us continue to put our faith on the experienced regimental officer for the selection of candidates^{1 3 2} for both temporary and regular commissions.

Needless to say, the Brigade of Guards did not draw their officers from the W.O.S.B.s.

The new selection methods may have provided a greater sense of meritocracy, but the extent to which they transformed the social composition of the officer corps

^{1 3 2} Lt.-Gen. Sir Giffard Martel, *An Outspoken Soldier. His Views and Memoirs* (London: Sifton Praed, 1949), p. 325.

must be questioned. Although William Shebbeare noted that once the W.O.S.B.s started, appearance and manners seemed to count for less,¹³³ it was also true that no fewer public schoolboys were commissioned under the new system than under the old. Whilst three-quarters of candidates accepted for O.C.T.U.s in a representative sample taken in 1943 had been educated in the state sector, a quarter still came from the public schools.¹³⁴ A further survey conducted in 1945 revealed over a third coming from public schools.¹³⁵ Indeed, it seemed that not much had changed since William Connor's calculation in 1941 that, as a fortieth of the nation's children, public schoolboys had fourteen times as good a chance of becoming officers.¹³⁶

This was no doubt partly a function of the quality of education a candidate had received, which enabled him to show up well during selection. As one soldier recorded:

Of course, there is unfairness in the fact that the man with a good education stands a better chance of being chosen than a man with a poor education. This means an advantage to the rich and the well-to-do. But the blame rests with the social system, not the Army. The Army can only accept things as they are, and prefer the officer

¹³³ Captain X, p. 57.

¹³⁴ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 397 (1943-44), col. 1435.

¹³⁵ WO 277/16, Sparrow, p. 22.

¹³⁶ Cassandra [William Connor], *The English at War* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1941), p. 86.

who is well equipped to¹³⁷ the officer whose equipment is less adequate.

According to Henry Harris, a wartime psychiatrist at a W.O.S.B., it was also a question of educational environment:

Those who go to boarding schools seem to mature earlier in their social relationships; and for this reason the public school seems to provide better immediately available junior officer material than the secondary school.¹³⁸

General Adam concluded: "We could have got all the officers that we wanted if we had a proper system of secondary education."¹³⁹

Yet there was also evidence to suggest that, despite the scientific input into the W.O.S.B.s, a good degree of personal subjectivity in selection still remained. Not only did Vernon and Parry draw attention to the decision-making process which, in their opinion, gave good scope for the subjective judgements of the Presidents,¹⁴⁰ but after its investigations at a designated Board during 1945, the W.O.S.B. Research and Training Centre's report noted:

¹³⁷ A Soldier in Two Wars, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 22 (October 1941), p. 361.

¹³⁸ Henry Harris, *The Group Approach to Leadership-Testing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 59.

¹³⁹ Adam VIII, chap. 2, p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Vernon and Parry, p. 55.

There is good reason to think that both W.O.S.Bs. and O.C.T.Us., and probably C.Os. too are influenced to a considerable degree by the appearance and general impression of the candidate or officer.¹⁴¹

"Appearance," it was recorded, could be considered from three angles; "Liveliness," "Bearing" and "Acceptability."¹⁴² "As a member of one Board," recalls a wartime officer, "I found them fair, with a leaning towards the traditional Officer types."¹⁴³

Towards the end of the war the Army began to consider its post-war officer selection policy. In November 1944, faced with the prospect of continuing conscription, the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems suggested a guiding principle:

We consider that, for the future, a system of selection must be adopted which gives an equal chance to men of potential ability regardless of their earlier circumstances.¹⁴⁴

It was conceded that on political grounds, as well as ensuring a common preliminary training, all potential officers should spend a period in the ranks. Yet the question of the selection procedure was deferred. In fact, the view was expressed to the E.C.A.C. that the

¹⁴¹ Private Papers of Dr. B. Semeonoff, R.T.C. Report No. 160.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ C. R. B., letter to the author, January 1989.

¹⁴⁴ WO 163/95, "Recruitment and Training of Regular Officers," Third Interim Report of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, E.C.A.C./P(44)94., 8 November 1944.

chief merit of the wartime system was that it tempered the discontent of rejected candidates, but this would be less important in peacetime.¹⁴⁵

The decision was eventually taken to retain the W.O.S.B.s but with modifications. Despite the Expert Committee's acknowledgment of the contribution of psychiatry and psychology to the selection of leaders,¹⁴⁶ in September 1946 the Crocker Committee recommended that not only psychiatrists but also psychologists should be removed as permanent members of the W.O.S.B.s. Moreover, it was argued, the responsibility for the recommendation of candidates for commissions should lie with commanding officers rather than P.S.O.s.¹⁴⁷

During 1943 psychiatrists had been removed as permanent members of the R.C.B.s. In August 1946 the Ritchie Committee completed the process of exclusion by proposing that psychologists be deleted from R.C.B. establishments as well. It was further advocated that colonels of regiments should be given more responsibility to inquire into applicants' background and suitability for regular

¹⁴⁵ WO 163/95, Minutes of the 188th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./P(44)46., 17 November 1944.

¹⁴⁶ CAB 98/27, Report by the Expert Committee for the Ministerial Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services, P.P.M.(45)1., 31 January 1945, pp. 4, 14.

¹⁴⁷ WO 32/12134, Report by the Committee of Enquiry on the System of Selection of Officers for Emergency Commissions, 23 September 1946.

commissions.¹⁴⁸

Despite the objections of the Director of Army Psychiatry and the Director-General Army Medical Services that the scientific procedures and medical safeguards could only be carried out properly by experts,¹⁴⁹ the new Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Richard O'Connor, supported the change in policy. He argued that the strength of feeling in the Army against psychologists and psychiatrists made it advisable that they be withdrawn from the Boards.¹⁵⁰

Bernard Ungerson, the Chief Psychologist to the War Office during this period, concluded:

The technical side of W.O.S.Bs., that is the psychologist and psychiatrist component in the Boards, was never properly accepted by all senior officers, nor, as is now well known, were we able to persuade the Army that such members were essential. Since 1946, the Boards have consisted only of military members, in spite of the contrary advice from all the very senior psychologists and psychiatrists who advise the War Office in these matters.¹⁵¹

The Director of Army Psychiatry noted: "The Ritchie and

¹⁴⁸ WO 32/12133, Report of an Investigation in connection with the Granting of Regular Commissions to Serving Commissioned Officers, A.C.46., 29 August 1946.

¹⁴⁹ WO 32/12134, D. of A. Psych. to D.S.P., 10 October 1946; WO 32/12134, D.G.A.M.S. to Brig. A.G. Co-ord., n.d. [but 1946].

¹⁵⁰ WO 32/12134, Office Note by A.A.G., 5 December 1946.

¹⁵¹ Bernard Ungerson, "Mr Morris on Officer Selection," *Occupational Psychology* 24 (January 1950), p. 55-56.

Crocker Reports put the clock back - the former to the cavalry age and the latter to the Lewis gun age."¹⁵² It seemed that the participants who did most to guarantee a more equitable selection system were no longer required.

During the course of the war, the War Office made important changes to the way in which it chose its officers. Whilst in the pre-war Army officers continued to be drawn from a limited cross-section of the nation and were chosen largely for their claims on gentility, the initiatives taken by the military authorities to improve the supply of candidates and the introduction of scientific selection methods seemed to give practical expression to the notion that every soldier had a field-marshal's baton in his knapsack, and that ability, rather than wealth and the correct educational background, was the sole prerequisite for commissioned rank. As the journalist, J. L. Hodson, recorded:

The old notion that playing polo and running a Rolls-Royce car are necessarily marks of a good officer is out of date; war knocks such ideas on the head. Leadership is the thing; and that springs from a broad field.¹⁵³

However, whilst it was evident that the public school class continued to enjoy certain advantages over other social groups during the war, it is perhaps revealing

¹⁵² WO 32/12134, D. of A. Psych. to D.S.P., 10 October 1946.

¹⁵³ J. L. Hodson, "Officers and Men," *The Spectator* 168 (June 1942), p. 550.

that Trevor Royle's investigation of the post-war Army recalls that not only were officers still required to be socially acceptable to most officers' messes, but that many national servicemen did not apply for officer selection because they were unable to afford the extra expenses of commissioned rank.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the Parliamentary Labour Party Defence and Services Group drew attention to the continuation of a hidden "means test" and other special arrangements which preserved the prestige regiments for the wealthy classes.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, it is relevant to note that during the post-war era not only did public schoolboys continue to predominate in the officer intake to Sandhurst, but by the 1960s it was estimated that they still formed an absolute majority of all new officers.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of their Lives. The National Service Experience 1945-63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), pp. 84, 88.

¹⁵⁵ WO 163/55, "Proposed Reforms for the Armed Forces," Memorandum by the Parliamentary Labour Party Defence and Services Group, 20 November 1946, Appendix "A" to A.C./P(46)19., 6 December 1946.

¹⁵⁶ Otley (2), p. 756.

4. PROMOTION

Once the Army had commissioned its new officers, it faced the problem of ensuring that the most competent of them were promoted to fill the higher ranks. During the First World War the heavy fighting and high officer casualty rate ensured that promotion was conducted to a much greater degree on merit than ever before, and a number of Territorial and New Army officers made rapid advances within the Army's hierarchy.¹ Yet it was clear that considerations of seniority, or Buggins' turn, still remained. Despite the influx of "civilian officers," the officer corps was to remain, particularly at the rank of lieutenant-colonel and above, the preserve of regular officers. It was, as one commentator has indicated, a function of a "craft-unionism," and a social and professional prejudice against "amateurs" which had been a long standing feature of regular attitudes towards auxiliaries.²

During the inter-war years promotion within the Regular Army officer corps up to the rank of lieutenant-colonel was usually conducted on a regimental and Corps basis and mainly by establishment. As a general rule

¹ Lord Haig's Final Despatch; cited in *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 358 (1939-40), cols. 1081-1082; Ian Beckett, "The Territorial Force," in *A Nation in Arms. A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, eds. Ian F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 141.

² Beckett, pp. 141-144.

vacancies were filled according to seniority. However, with the reduction in the size of the Army and a surplus of senior officers as a legacy of the war years, there arose a chronic block in promotion, particularly in the cavalry and infantry regiments where establishments were relatively small, and it was not unusual for subalterns to have had over ten years service and captains over twenty.³ Certain Corps tried various schemes to speed up the promotion of the more able officers, but this merely added to inequalities in the rate of promotion between different Corps and regiments.⁴

It was not until the officer recruiting shortages of the mid-1930s compelled an improvement in the career prospects of young officers, that any real reform was undertaken. In December 1937 the Willingdon Committee, which had been appointed to examine the whole question of officer supply, recommended that all establishment promotion be stopped and a system of time-promotion adopted.⁵ With the consent of the inter-departmental

³ Gerald F. Spillman, "Manpower Problems in the British Army. The Balancing of Resources and Commitments" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985), p. 122.

⁴ Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 32/4461, Second Report of the Committee on the Supply of Army Officers, December 1937, pp. 34-35.

⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

Warren-Fisher Committee,⁶ Hore-Belisha announced in July 1938 that all officers up to the rank of major would be guaranteed promotion at stated intervals in their career, subject to efficiency. Promotion to lieutenant would be awarded after three years, from lieutenant to captain after eight years, and from captain to major after seventeen. Promotion to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and above would be by selection for the purpose of filling particular appointments. Simultaneously, reductions in the retirement ages of major and above were announced, with majors being retired at forty-seven and lieutenant-colonels at fifty.⁷ On 5 August 1938 nearly 2,500 officers were promoted.⁸

In essence, the reforms provided a compromise between guaranteeing a more assured career path for all officers and ensuring that the most able were appointed to command units and fill the Army's higher ranks. However, even allowing for antedates to service for the most able, it was still a system of seniority in which length of service rather than merit alone was the chief criterion for the advancement of the majority of the Army's officers. In the opinion of one officer, it placed a

⁶Public Record Office, Admiralty Papers, ADM 116/3638, Report of the Committee on the Conditions of Service of Officers of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force, July 1938, p. 29.

⁷*Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 338 (1937-38), cols. 3301-3302.

⁸R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 132.

"premium on mediocrity."⁹

The effects of the new methods of promotion system were, though, obscured by the outbreak of war. In January 1939 the Liddell Committee presented a report outlining a wartime promotion code for Army officers,¹⁰ and this formed the basis of the system adopted in September. Under the wartime code regular officers were allowed to retain their substantive ranks and accumulate service towards substantive promotion. However, a new structure of acting, temporary and war substantive ranks was transposed onto this. In essence, this was designed to allow officers to be promoted to fill vacancies in war establishments as and when it was required, yet at the same time provide a certain underlying continuity of advancement. An officer would progress up the ranks in an acting, and after a defined qualifying period, a temporary capacity. Yet concurrently he would be confirmed as war substantive, tenable for the duration of the war, in the rank immediately below his highest temporary appointment. Provided he had achieved temporary status, no officer would thus have to revert more than

⁹ Lt.-Col. Graham Seton Hutchison, "Selection and Education of an Officer," *Army Quarterly* 42 (April 1941), p. 73.

¹⁰ WO 163/68, Report of the Committee on Commissioning, Promotion and Relative Seniority of Officers in War Time, C.C.A.C.130., 4 January 1939.

one rank on displacement.¹¹

Although promotion from second lieutenant to lieutenant was to be automatically granted after eighteen months, provided service was deemed satisfactory, commanding officers of units, normally lieutenant-colonels, were to control promotion up to major.¹² Appointments to lieutenant-colonel and above were entrusted to selection boards of senior officers.¹³ The peacetime retirement age limits were also put into abeyance, officers being retained as long as their services were required, and the pre-war system of annual confidential reports on officers suspended because of the sheer administrative burden of reporting on so large a number of wartime officers.¹⁴ Moreover, it was announced that apart from the granting of regular substantive rank, all wartime promotion was to be based solely on merit.¹⁵ "There is, thus, every chance," promised Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War in 1940, "for the young officer of outstanding

¹¹ WO 32/4543, *Conditions Governing the Commissioning and Promotion of Army Officers in War Time*, War Office, 28 August 1939.

¹² WO 32/10583, M.S. to P.U.S., 4 August 1939.

¹³ WO 163/88, "The System of Confidential Reports on Officers," Memorandum by M.S., E.C.A.C./P(42)56., 29 April 1942.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 351 (1938-39), col. 939.

merit to reach high rank."¹⁶

On the outbreak of the war, the Army had at its disposal 14,500 serving Regular Army officers, 19,000 serving Territorial Army officers and 20,000 Regular, Territorial and Supplementary Reserve officers.¹⁷ To these were added the new temporary wartime officers as they came off the production lines, eventually numbering some 210,000.¹⁸ It was laid down that the relative seniority of officers of the same rank on the outbreak of the conflict was to be judged, in the case of serving regulars, by the original date that such rank was granted, and for other officers by the date of calling up or mobilization. However, it was instructed that Regular Army Reserve officers would be judged senior to serving territorial officers and other categories of reserve officers whose war seniority bore the same date. Seniority in any rank granted after mobilization was to be calculated on the date of appointment.¹⁹

In view of the strenuous demands of the war as it

¹⁶ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 363 (1939-40), col. 1136.

¹⁷ WO 277/12, "British Army Assets and Potential Assets on 1st September, 1939," Appendix "A" to "Manpower Problems," War Office Monograph compiled by Maj.-Gen. A. J. K. Pigott, 1949, p. 79.

¹⁸ WO 277/16, "Morale," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. H. A. Sparrow, 1949, p. 21.

¹⁹ WO 32/4543, *Conditions Governing the Commissioning and Promotion of Army Officers in War Time*.

developed, it was vital that able, young, junior officers were given the opportunity to rise quickly up the promotion ladder, particularly to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and above, if the military efficiency of the Army was to be maintained. Moreover, as the Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg, was to point out in 1942, suiting people to the correct jobs, getting the right leadership and promoting the right officers was "about the most important single consideration in affecting the morale of the Army, the most important thing to get done."²⁰

However, in the early years of the war it became apparent that this was not always occurring. One factor in this problem was that, despite efforts to remove inefficient officers, the Army was not displacing enough of the older reserve, territorial and regular officers, whom it had urgently needed to fill establishments in the first months of the war, but who were clearly unfit, on physical or temperamental grounds, for their posts. The War Office did provide an administrative procedure which allowed reports to be submitted by superior officers on subordinates who were considered to be unfit for their present employment, or who were recommended for some other employment. This was consolidated in 1941 with the introduction of Army Form B.194(F) which was a recommendation for a change to a more suitable

²⁰WO 259/64, Transcript of Off-the-Record Conference with Press Editors, 18 March 1942.

employment, and Army Form B.194(E) which was an adverse report. Both reports could be submitted at any time.²¹

Yet although a number of officers were displaced under this system, and 171 were relegated to unemployment between July and November 1941,²² it was clear that for fear of disloyalty, or reluctance to render reports on subordinates against whose character there was no complaint, the system was not operating with full effectiveness. As Lieutenant-General Montgomery, a Corps commander in Britain in 1941, noted: "I have said all this before many times. But I still go round the Corps and find bad C.O.s and old and useless Majors. Some Commanders do not seem to know how to get rid of bad or unsuitable officers."²³

The result was that the Army was retaining substantial numbers of officers of the rank of lieutenant-colonel and below, particularly in the fighting units, who were not only unfit for their posts, but were blocking the advancement of younger and better trained officers who were becoming available in greater numbers. Indeed, by the Summer of 1941 the average age of infantry unit

²¹ WO 163/88, E.C.A.C./P(42)56.

²² WO 163/50, "Age Limits for the Retention of Officers," Memorandum by P.J.G., A.C./P(41)61., 6 November 1941.

²³ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Allfrey Papers, Allfrey 1/5, Corps Commander's Personal Memoranda for Commanders, by Lt.-Gen. B. Montgomery, 1 June 1941.

commanders was still forty-five years and nine months.²⁴

In a paper to the Army Council in November, the Military Members outlined the problem:

The Military Members of the Army Council have become increasingly aware of the opinion generally held by divisional and other senior commanders that their commanding officers are too old; and a number of cases have occurred where those commanders have felt obliged to recommend the removal of commanding officers, some of them Regular officers with excellent records, because they were showing signs of losing their drive and efficiency as a result of their age, which has often been about 47 or 48.²⁵

At the same time, the paper continued:

... there is evidence that a number of junior officers of and beyond middle age, who were called up or voluntarily offered their services at a time when the supply of trained officers of a younger type was not enough to fill establishments, no longer have the physical fitness and mental agility to enable them to carry out their duties with full efficiency.²⁶

Not only was it stressed that positive measures had to be taken to reduce the ages of commanding officers, lest the Army be sent to active operations with a large number who would be likely to fail in battle, but it was argued:

If an adequate flow of promotion, acting and substantive, is to be maintained and full use is to be made of the capabilities of the younger officers who are now showing themselves fitted

²⁴ WO 163/85, "Age of Appointment to a Lieutenant-Colonel's Command," Memorandum by M.S., E.C.A.C./P(41)73., 4 September 1941.

²⁵ WO 163/50, A.C./P(41)61.

²⁶ Ibid.

for higher responsibilities, vacancies must somehow be created for them.²⁷

To this end, the Military Members proposed a number of measures. Primarily, it was recommended that the age limit for appointment to a Field Force unit command should be forty-five, the age dropping by a year every six months until the upper age limit was forty-three. In addition, it was proposed that no officer should be retained in command of a Field Force unit who had reached the age limit for the retirement of a regular lieutenant-colonel, namely fifty, and that officers in command of non-Field Force units should be retired at fifty-five. Furthermore, whilst it was recognized that there were a number of posts which could be held by junior officers up to a reasonably advanced age, it was contended that all officers of the rank of major and below who were over forty-five should be scrutinized to assess their fitness for employment, and that no officer should be retained in any capacity in the Service beyond fifty-five.²⁸

The enforcement of arbitrary age limits was, however, regarded with a good deal of unease by other members. Not only was it considered that age was no real criterion of physical fitness and mental alertness and that maturity of judgement usually began to develop at the age of forty-five, but that rigid age rules would merely deprive

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

the Army of potential commanders of higher formations. The Germans, it was noted, paid no attention to the ages of their commanders. Moreover, it was argued, the Middle East was already 700 short of its officer establishments and, at a time of acute manpower shortages, the policy of discharging officer material suffering only from disability imposed by an arbitrary age limit would not only be indefensible in Parliament, but would be hard to justify to the Ministry of Labour as the Army pressed the department to meet its manpower requirements.²⁹

Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff at the time, recorded:

I am no politician but I should have thought that properly presented a splendid case could have been put to the public. Headlines 'Rejuvenating the Army' 'Blimps to Go' etc & etc. Yet here we were the three head 'Blimps' in the War Office trying to get some freshening up in the Army and the politicians defeating it!³⁰

The Finance Member, Duncan Sandys, was, nevertheless, commissioned to investigate the problem, along with the Military Secretary, Lieutenant-General A. N. Floyer-Acland, and the Adjutant-General, General Adam, who were

²⁹ WO 163/50, Minutes of the 11th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(41)11., 12 November 1941.

³⁰ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Pownall Papers, diary entry, 16 November 1941.

the War Office authorities concerned with promotion.³¹ Taking into account anxiety over age limits, in a paper to the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) in December it was proposed that a special review be carried out of all officers of the rank of lieutenant-colonel and below, with a view to assessing their fitness to perform the duties of the positions they held.

The draft Army Council Instruction (A.C.I.) submitted to the Committee noted:

It has become evident that there are now a number of officers, who for a variety of reasons (such as advancing age, physical or mental slowness, lack of determination or drive, overstrain, unadaptability of temperament or character), are not able with full success to discharge their present duties. It is only fair to them personally, to the army as a whole and to the cause for which we are fighting, that these officers should be replaced without delay³² by others better suited to perform these duties.

Under the review, reports on officers below the rank of lieutenant-colonel were to be submitted by commanding officers of units. Reports on commanding officers were to be completed by brigade or equivalent commanders. Governed purely by an officer's ability to perform his duties under the exacting conditions of war, and not in any way prohibiting the normal submission of reports

³¹ WO 163/86, Minutes of the 37th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./P(41)37., 5 December 1941.

³² WO 163/86, "Review of Suitability of Officers," Draft Army Council Instruction prepared by F.M., Appendix "A" to E.C.A.C./P(41)121., 20 December 1941.

under existing arrangements, reporting officers were either to recommend an officer for retention in present employment, removal to less active employment or relegation to unemployment. The A.C.I. continued:

Every effort will be made, in the case of officers who are thus displaced, to find for them some other more suitable and less exacting duties. However, a proportion will necessarily have to be reverted to unemployment. On the other hand, in view of the steady increase in the number of fully trained officers of the younger type, there need be no anxiety about the possibility of providing, by promotion within units or by cross-posting, a sufficiency of suitable and well-qualified officers to fill the vacancies created.³³

Although this was considered a more politically acceptable approach, doubts were expressed about the administrative practicability of processing the 100,000 reports that would be rendered under the scheme, particularly if the review was to be completed before the recommencement of the operational season in the Spring of 1942. It was further questioned whether enough vacancies would be created without enforcing some form of age limit.³⁴

The matter was referred to a conference of War Office Directors who reported in January 1942. Their assessment was that to overcome the administrative difficulties the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ WO 163/86, Minutes of the 39th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(41)39., 23 December 1941.

scope of the review needed to be limited. It was thus not only proposed that the review should be largely confined to officers in Home Commands, but that attention should be devoted to those officers who, it was deemed, had reached the age at which some falling off in physical and mental efficiency would be expected. This age was set at forty-five. It was also recommended that within this review there should be a special scrutiny of officers over fifty-five, with instructions that those over that age should only being retained if they had particular qualifications or experience. Under this modified scheme it was calculated that 16,962 officers would be reported upon.³⁵

Although fears were still voiced that the scheme might have embarrassing political repercussions, on 16 January the E.C.A.C. consented to the proposed review.³⁶ In February arrangements were made with the Ministry of Labour to help dismissed officers find civilian employment, and the Ministry stated their intention to request the Regional Manpower Boards to consider officers who applied to them for employment as replacements for younger men in reserved occupations who could be released

³⁵ WO 163/87, The Retention of Officers in War Time. Report of a Conference of Directors, E.C.A.C./P(42)4., 14 January 1942.

³⁶ WO 163/87, Minutes of the 42nd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)3., 16 January 1942.

for the Armed Forces.³⁷ Against a background of growing press and public criticism over the efficiency of regimental officers, and the failure of the Army to give youth a chance,³⁸ the Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg, gave his consent and the scheme came into operation at the end of the month, the bulk of the reports being submitted by the end of April.³⁹

Under the review, 17,636 officers were reported upon. 13,804 were graded "R", retention in present employment, 1,966 graded "S", removal to less active employment, and 1,866 graded "T", relegation to unemployment. 296 "T"s were later reclassified on appeal.⁴⁰ Subject inevitably to considerations of self-interest endemic in any scheme of officers reporting confidentially on fellow officers,⁴¹ it did, in the opinion of soldiers like William Shebbeare, serve a useful purpose. "Under this scheme," he noted, "a good many officers were either retired or placed where they would do little harm. It was a creditable measure."⁴²

³⁷ WO 163/90, The Retention of Officers in Wartime: A.C.I. 422 of 1942. Report on the Review., E.C.A.C./P(43)6., 11 January 1943.

³⁸ WO 259/64, D.P.R. to S. of S., 7 March 1942.

³⁹ WO 163/88, Progress of Review of Officers under A.C.I. 422 of 1942: 28th April, 1942., E.C.A.C./P(42)54., 28 April 1942.

⁴⁰ WO 163/90, E.C.A.C./P(43)6.

⁴¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Pakenham-Walsh Papers, diary entry, 28 March 1942.

⁴² Captain X [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), p. 17.

A further problem for the military authorities, however, lay in the fact that junior officers were not always being promoted with sufficient speed into vacancies that were created. In 1941 the War Office did call for a quarterly report, Army Form B.194(D), to be submitted by commanding officers on officers who were recommended for promotion to a unit command. Yet apart from the stipulation that all second lieutenants would be automatically promoted to lieutenant after eighteen months, provided service was satisfactory, there was no administrative provision for advancement within a unit.⁴³

What became apparent was that not only was there a tendency on the part of some commanding officers to rate the efficiency of their formations higher in importance than an individual's promotion, and thus refrain from submitting reports that would entail losing their most efficient officers,⁴⁴ but there was also evidence to suggest that there was still an unwillingness to promote officers over the heads of their more senior colleagues. "The present system has many disadvantages," wrote General Adam, "the chief of which, to my mind, is the reluctance of C.O.s to promote even outstanding 2nd Lieutenants to Captains."⁴⁵ The observations of the

⁴³WO 163/88, E.C.A.C./P(42)56.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵WO 32/4543, A.G. to P.U.S.(F)., 29 May 1942.

author Alan Wood, serving as an officer in the Royal Artillery, are worth recording at length:

Most men with outstanding qualifications get commissions eventually if they try hard enough. If another Napoleon were to enter the British Army to-day as an ordinary conscript, it is quite possible that he would be given a commission - in time. Perhaps after a year. But what is absolutely certain is that he would never rise above the rank of captain before the war was over. To begin with, his promotion would depend on zealousness in upholding the Army's little ways and on exactitude in obeying orders: and another Napoleon could not conceal his impatience with the Army and his knowledge that his superiors were his inferiors. Moreover, promotion in the Army goes, above all else, by seniority. A brilliant officer will rise a few ranks above the average for his years of service. A dud will remain a few ranks below. That is all. So the up and coming soldier, who was a ranker at the beginning of the war, has to push his way through three layers of senior officers who have got a start on him, who still hold a monopoly of the higher ranks, and who are quite incompetent to run an army without his help.

Consider these layers in turn. Analyse the Army officers from another standpoint, in terms of seniority. First, officers of the Regular Army....

Secondly, the Territorial officers....

Thirdly, there is the bunch of Old Etonians who joined up immediately on the outbreak of war, who were promptly recommended for commissions....

These are the three layers of the military ruling classes, reading from top to bottom in order of seniority, keeping up their relative positions and keeping down the aspiring subaltern. However high he rises in his own layer as time goes on, members of the other layers will have moved up too. Similarly, the Old Etonian in Layer 3, however swift his promotion, is likely to find a Territorial in Layer 2 one rank ahead of him: even if he burst through this layer in a meteoric jump, he will still find himself under the orders of a Regular in Layer 1.

Plainly this whole system of promotion has to be revised. It makes no provision for emergence to high rank during this war of another Napoleon, who became a general at twenty-six: or of amateur soldiers like Cromwell and Washington. Promotion by seniority may work all right in peace-time in

the Regular Army, where the ambitious soldier has a lifetime in which to climb his way up. It is no use for the amateur soldier-for-the-duration, who is only in the Army for the purpose of winning this particular war, and is not interested in the possibility of his becoming a general twenty years hence. The situation now is even worse than in 1914-18, because there has been so little fighting so far. Far too few senior officers have been killed; while far too few junior officers, who should replace them, have had actual experience under fire. Thus the top layers in the Army are even more firmly on top to-day than they were in the last war.⁴⁶

In discussion of these problems at the beginning of May 1942, the E.C.A.C. agreed that surprise checks should be made upon the manner in which commanding officers were submitting A.F.B.194(D)s, with a view to taking disciplinary action against any C.O. who was taking an unduly parochial attitude.⁴⁷

Moreover, General Floyer-Acland outlined a scheme which was being experimented with in one division in South Eastern Command as a means of improving advancement within units. The "Red and Blue" scheme, as it was known, required commanding officers, in their periodic returns of officers, to underline in "blue" those subalterns and captains who were worthy of advancement, and in "red" captains and majors who were unfit for their posts. Using these lists it was intended to cross-post officers

⁴⁶ Boomerang [Alan Wood], *Bless 'Em All. An Analysis of the Morale, Efficiency and Leadership of the British Army* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1942), pp. 53-56.

⁴⁷ WO 163/88, Minutes of the 57th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)18., 1 May 1942.

between units with the aim of downgrading those marked "red" and speeding up the promotion of those marked "blue." The Military Secretary recorded:

Although this is not a scheme entailing confidential reports, it is a method by which it is hoped to improve the distribution of good regimental officers in battalions, and it is designed to have the effect of outstanding junior officers being brought within the range for recommendation for command, at an earlier age than would have been the case had they been left to rely mainly on regimental seniority.⁴⁸

The scheme was, however, regarded with a good deal of mistrust by some members of the E.C.A.C. It was contended that an extensive system of cross-posting was out of keeping with the traditions of the British Army, and that it would be particularly resented by officers in the cavalry and infantry regiments. General Adam, though, sprang to its defence. He argued that not only had it not been lightly undertaken and that events had already compelled a great deal of movement on the part of officers, but that the general efficiency of a unit should be known to formation commanders and if a commanding officer's "red" and "blue" statement did not fairly accurately reflect that state of efficiency, then that fact would catch the eye.⁴⁹ Despite the opposition of General Paget, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, Sir James Grigg was persuaded in September to agree to its

⁴⁸ WO 163/88, E.C.A.C./P(42)56.

⁴⁹ WO 163/88, E.C.A.C./M(42)18.

extension to other commands at home.⁵⁰

A reduction of the probationary period of a second lieutenant to six months accompanied this initiative. In a submission to the E.C.A.C. in June 1942, Adam argued that this was vital not just in terms of improving the financial prospects of junior officers and thus the supply of officer candidates,⁵¹ but also in terms of stimulating unit promotion:

The present rule hinders the promotion to captaincy of the outstanding second lieutenant (with consequent loss to the Service) since his commanding officer is reluctant to promote him over the heads of the lieutenants; the promotion of a first rate junior lieutenant would be more practicable.⁵²

With the support of Grigg, the reduction was announced to the Army at the end of September and all those second lieutenants who had completed six months of satisfactory service prior to 1 October were promoted to lieutenant.⁵³

The "Red and Blue" scheme was destined to last only six months. In March 1943 Paget forwarded reports from his Army Commanders to the War Office, and stated that they

⁵⁰ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 77th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)38., 18 September 1942.

⁵¹ see chap. 3, pp. 53-54.

⁵² WO 163/89, "Time Promotion of Second Lieutenants," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)88., 16 June 1942.

⁵³ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 79th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)40., 2 October 1942.

were unanimous in their opinion that the scheme did not justify the amount of work and expenditure of paper involved in its administration. Not only was it noted that there were very few officers being marked "red" by commanding officers, and such cases were already dealt with by A.F.B.194(E)s or (F)s, but that the percentage of officers marked "blue" was also small, and for most of those, vacancies in their own units were in view.⁵⁴ It appeared that the scheme had been scuppered.

In these circumstances Adam was compelled to request a cancellation. In discussion, the E.C.A.C. recalled that it had had some doubts about the scheme at the time of its inception, and agreed that in the light of the reports it would be a mistake to perpetuate it.⁵⁵ It was contended, though, that fresh endeavours should be made to ensure that the qualifications for the promotion of junior officers were brought to notice. To this end, a new A.C.I. was prepared by the Adjutant-General and the Military Secretary and issued in July 1943. It announced the discontinuation of the "Red and Blue" scheme, but emphasized the responsibility of commanding officers in ensuring that outstanding junior officers were either promoted within units, or brought to the attention of

⁵⁴ WO 163/90, "Confidential Reports on Officers: The 'Red and Blue' Scheme," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(43)42., 5 April 1943.

⁵⁵ WO 163/90, Minutes of the 105th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(43)15., 9 April 1943.

higher authority if no vacancy within a unit could be foreseen.⁵⁶

By the latter half of the war there was evidence to suggest that junior officers were enjoying speedier promotion. Certainly, a good number of older officers continued to command non-fighting units,⁵⁷ prompting *The Economist* to remark that "the Army at home remains, in some respects, as hidebound, as unsympathetic and as favourite-ridden as ever."⁵⁸ However, by 1944 William Shebbeare observed:

In many fighting units the average age of the Majors is about 28 and there are plenty of Colonels of 30. Most of these young Colonels and Majors are regular soldiers and, while it is true that before the war young men with brains seldom chose the army for a career, the great characteristic of these officers is that they are young.⁵⁹

Indeed, by the end of the war *Army Quarterly* noted that the average age of battalion and regimental commanders had fallen to thirty-two.⁶⁰

Yet what continued to be evident, and what Shebbeare

⁵⁶ WO 163/91, Minutes of the 117th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(43)27., 2 July 1943; WO 163/52, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(43)21., July 1943.

⁵⁷ WO 163/90, "Senior Command Appointments," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(44)43., 17 May 1944.

⁵⁸ Editorial, *The Economist* 145 (October 1943), p. 580.

⁵⁹ Captain X, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁰ Editorial, *Army Quarterly* 53 (January 1947), p. 153.

alluded to, was that proportionately few non-regular officers rose to the ranks of lieutenant-colonel and above. One soldier recalls that staff major was regarded as the ceiling for temporary wartime officers,⁶¹ whilst Colonel Greenwell, M.P for The Hartlepoons, contended:

I submit that after five years of war it is not unreasonable to say that man for man the Territorial Army officer and the Regular Army officer ought to be of the same standard of efficiency, but it may be said that it would be easier for a cable to go through the eye of a needle than for a Territorial Army officer to aspire to a rank higher than that of major, and certainly the command of formations such as brigade and higher seems to be almost exclusively though not entirely, reserved for Regular officers.⁶²

This was no doubt a function of the fact that officers with greater seniority and experience were generally considered to be the most meritorious. However, some "amateurs" always felt there was an element of unjustifiable discrimination against them. Jack Houghton, a territorial officer who served in a battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment, recalled:

Eventually the time came when my good friend the C.O. had completed his three year tenure of command. One day the Brigadier came to me and told me that 'Monty', who was now our Army Commander had arranged for me to take over command. I was to be immediately promoted Lieut-Colonel and would take over my duties the following day. I got back that evening and the Adjutant produced a telegram from the War Office,

⁶¹ Peter Harris, letter to the author, January 1988.

⁶² *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 409 (1944-45), col. 150.

posting _ _ to command the battalion!! For once General Montgomery had been over-ruled! Of course I was bitterly disappointed, especially as I knew that _ was much junior to me. However, he had the advantage of being a regular soldier, and by this time we Territorials had learnt that they always had priority over us.⁶³

According to another correspondent, rumour had it that in the second battalion, the Irish Rangers, no territorial would be allowed to command even a company whilst the battalion was in Britain.⁶⁴ In fact, Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. A. Brown, a territorial commanding the second battalion, the Monmouthshire Regiment, recorded that regular officers who found themselves in subordinate ranks could sometimes cause difficulties within a unit. "It was apparent," he wrote, "that a few of these Regular Officers were not finding it easy to serve under a Territorial Commanding Officer, and it became necessary to keep a close watch on attitudes and performance."⁶⁵ Indeed, Frederick Bellenger, who was to become Secretary of State for War in 1946, went as far as to argue that: "Territorial officers may have got promotion while they were territorials, but, when the war broke out, the regular officers did their best to displace them on every

⁶³ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Houghton-Brown Papers, typescript narrative by Col. Jack Houghton-Brown entitled "Farmer - Soldier," p. 127.

⁶⁴ Imperial War Museum, Dunlop Papers, letter to Brig. Sir John Dunlop, 3 January 1942, author unknown.

⁶⁵ Imperial War Museum, Browne Papers, typescript narrative by Lt.-Col. A. T. A. Browne entitled "A Portrait of a Man in Two World Wars," p. 19.

possible occasion."⁶⁶

By fair means or foul, the result was that the command appointments, and thus the day-to-day control of the Army, remained very largely in the hands of the professionals throughout the war. At the end of 1942 it was recorded that three-quarters of officers holding the rank of lieutenant-colonel and above were regular or regular reserve officers.⁶⁷ By the end of the conflict it was calculated that nine out of ten officers who had held the rank of brigadier and above had been regulars.⁶⁸ Whilst this was no doubt militarily adroit in many senses, it did, in the opinion of some of those serving, have certain implications for Army life over these years. As G. K. Lewis recorded in November 1943:

Wealth and birth remain the passport to the higher ranks. The rank above major almost invariably, that above colonel invariably, is filled by the 'right sort' of people.... The Select Committee on National Expenditure has remarked on the ease with which titled socialites obtained high ranking commissions in the early days of the A.T.S. One can well imagine, then, the state of things in the older Regular Army. All this has bred a very special social and political bias about the upper 'ten thousand' in the Army. It influences everything: the incidence of promotion, the scope offered to new ideas, the

⁶⁶ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 409 (1944-45), col. 135.

⁶⁷ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 383 (1942-43), col. 2235.

⁶⁸ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 427 (1945-46), col. 9.

conception of the art of leadership.⁶⁹

Although it was conceded that temporary and war substantive rank would need to remain in the interim, the priority of merit in the promotion of officers was not to last long into the post-war era. Its continuation was clearly unpalatable to a number of officers as they sought to reorganize the Regular Army officer corps. In December 1945 a conference of War Office directors noted:

Officers were still being given temporary promotion by merit (as opposed to seniority) although it was becoming increasingly difficult to assess pure merit now that the fighting had ceased. As a result there were, for example, senior officers with much administrative experience who were being kept in extra-regimental employment or in subordinate posts whilst their juniors remained in command of regiments or battalions and, although they had undoubtedly commanded them well in battle and during active service conditions, it had to be recognised that they did not all possess the administrative qualifications or experience necessary to hold such appointments under present-day conditions.⁷⁰

In January 1946 the E.C.A.C. endorsed the directors' recommendation that promotion be recentralized at the earliest opportunity in order that it could be "tempered very much by seniority."⁷¹

⁶⁹G. K. Lewis, "Blimp's Successor," *The Tribune*, no. 359 (1943), p. 10.

⁷⁰WO 163/98, "War-Time Promotion Code: Modifications Necessary to meet Present Conditions," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(45)131., 31 December 1945.

⁷¹WO 163/98, E.C.A.C./P(45)131; WO 163/99, Minutes of the 246th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(46)2., 11 January 1946.

Indeed, despite the acknowledged success of the "juniors," it was reiterated in March that the post-war officer's career would continue to be determined, as in the pre-war Army, by substantive promotion linked to years of service, with the command appointments filled by selection. Certainly, the experiences of the war had proved the need for an accelerated system. Promotion to lieutenant, captain and major was to be after two, six and thirteen years respectively. Moreover, it was announced that the retirement age for all lieutenant-colonels would be reduced to forty-five.⁷² What was implicit in this system, though, was a certain conflict of interests. As the Military Secretary noted in November 1946:

In peace the average age of a unit commander is between 40-45, or will be as soon as the reorganisation of officers into their correct ranks and ages has been accomplished. It is a satisfactory age for a commanding officer in peace in view of career, length of service and pension.

From experience in two world wars it has been conclusively proved that the best age for the commander of a unit, certainly in the R.A.C., Infantry and certain other Corps in the Army, is between the ages of 28-36.⁷³

Within a few months of V.E. Day *Army Quarterly* held that

⁷² *Post-War Code of Pay, Allowances, Retired Pay and Service Gratuities for Commissioned Officers of the Armed Forces*, Cmd. 6750 (March 1946), p. 4.

⁷³ WO 32/13253, "The Problem of Officers' Ages for Command," Memorandum by M.S., M.S.B.M.1793., 25 November 1946.

the average age of unit commanders had risen to forty-two.⁷⁴

During the war the War Office made a number of important initiatives in the field of promotion. Whilst the advancement of officers in the pre-war Army continued to be governed largely by matters of seniority, the military authorities not only instructed that promotion was to be based solely on merit, but took a number of practical steps to seek to ensure that the Army became a more genuine *carrière ouverte aux talents*. However, whilst opportunities may have existed for young officers of ability to progress up the ranks regardless of their antecedents, not only was it clear that the command appointments continued to be monopolized by regulars, but it is perhaps also relevant to record that a year after the end of the war it was reported that soldiers were complaining of their senior officers that there were "far too many old men in the Army not pulling their weight."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Editorial, *Army Quarterly* 53 (January 1947), p. 153.

⁷⁵ WO 163/281, Committee on Army Life. Report by Lt.-Col. R. C. H. Kirwan and Lt.-Col. D. H. A. Mackenzie, n.d.[but July 1946].

5. OFFICERS AND MEN

A vital problem upon which the War Office was forced to focus its attention was the establishment of a good working relationship between its officers and men. The trench warfare of 1914-18, in which junior officers and men were forced to live together in close proximity and in appalling conditions for long periods of time, did provide greater opportunities than hitherto for the development of closer inter-rank relations.¹ However, the officer-man relationship had always been, and would continue to be in the post-war era, a distant and in many senses a feudal one. Primarily, the King's commission continued to confer upon officers superior living conditions and numerous other privileges denied to the rank and file. Similarly, whilst officers were expected to take a paternal interest in the welfare of their men, the style of leadership employed remained essentially "autocratic" in nature.² Implicit in the efforts in the latter 1930s to widen the social basis of the officer corps, and in particular in Hore-Belisha's proposal that as part of their training officer cadets should spend a year in the ranks, was the recognition that the modern

¹ G. D. Sheffield, "The Effect of the Great War on Class Relations in Britain: The Career of Major Christopher Stone DSO MC," *War & Society* 7 (May 1989), p. 91; H. Essame, "The P.B.I.," *Army Quarterly* 100 (July 1970), p. 205.

² Maj.-Gen. J. F. C. Fuller, *The Army in my Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), p. 222; Lt.-Col. Graham Seton Hutchison, "Selection and Education of an Officer," *Army Quarterly* 42 (April 1941), p. 73.

recruit needed to be led with rather more tact and sympathy than in former years.³ Nevertheless, the military authorities continued to devote little attention to problems of man-management. In a volunteer Army composed of well-disciplined regular soldiers, led by officers whose social and educational background marked them out as natural leaders, anything more was considered unnecessary.⁴ In fact, Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Bingham, who came to earn a certain notoriety in this field, noted that whilst the subject of "animal management" received voluminous treatment from the Army authorities, the human beings in the Army seemed to have been ignored.⁵

Entering the Service in 1939, William Shebbeare characterized his officers as almost a species from another planet who gave the impression that they were dealing with a herd of cattle:

Officers in the army are a race apart. To the new recruit they appear to have no connection with the army at all. It seems to him that if the Officers' Mess blew up in the night, the life of the unit would go on undisturbed.

³Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 32/4463, Second Report of the Committee on the Supply of Army Officers, December 1937, p. 10; R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 53.

⁴Brig. C. M. L. Elliot, "Group Psychology and Leadership," *Army Quarterly* 55 (October 1947), p. 88.

⁵Lt.-Col. R. C. Bingham, "Man-Management," *Army Quarterly* 41 (October 1940), p. 121.

⁶Captain X [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), p. 10.

The establishment of a close and comradely relationship between officers and men was of central importance to the morale and thus the fighting efficiency of the Army. Yet as the war developed it became clear that this was not occurring. By 1942 Army morale reports were commenting on a serious "us" and "them" attitude on the part of soldiers towards their leaders which was undermining the very solidarity of the Army.⁷

One factor in this problem was that whilst the comforts and privileges accorded to officers were generally accepted if they were borne of military necessity, those for which there seemed little justification apart from the notion that gentility was part and parcel of the officer's status, were resented by many of the citizen soldiers.⁸ As one Army morale report argued:

The morale and fighting spirit of the Army as a whole would be enhanced if the ordinary soldier could be reassured that differentiations due to social tradition and the subordination involved in military discipline do not imply a fundamental conflict of interests. Anything, on the other hand, that strengthens his belief in the existence of a fundamental gulf or barrier between himself and his leaders has an immediate

⁷ WO 163/161, Draft Morale Report, May-July 1942, M.C./P(42)1., 11 September 1942; WO 163/161, Morale Report, August-October 1942, M.C./P(42)3., 15 December 1942.

⁸ David Englander and Tony Mason, *The British Soldier in World War II* (Warwick Working Papers in Social History, 1984), p. 8; Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive [hereafter M.O.-A.], FR 1485, 12 November 1942.

and marked adverse effect on morale.⁹

Certainly, the restrictions of wartime did serve to narrow differences in the day-to-day standard of living between officers and men. Shortages of accommodation meant that officers' messes could often be spartan in their provision. Rationing ensured that the standards of cuisine in the mess were rarely as sumptuous as in peacetime. The shortage of manpower also acted to reduce establishments of officers' batmen.¹⁰ However, aware of the feelings of the rank and file, and the readiness of the press and parliament to attack the Army for perpetuating an outdated class system, the War Office did take positive steps to try to alleviate some of the more insupportable inequalities which came to its attention.

One area that the War Office was compelled to re-examine was the latitude given to local commanders to reserve hotel lounge bars and other establishments for the exclusive use of officers, whilst other ranks were often confined to the less salubrious public bars. Although on the outbreak of war the Army Council declared that it would not prohibit officers and other ranks from taking meals and refreshments together in public places, it was also laid down that it was not conducive to good discipline for officers and men to be seen drinking

⁹WO 163/161, M.C./P(42)1.

¹⁰WO 163/102, "Servants and Batmen," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(47)1., 1 January 1947.

together in public bars, and commanding officers were enjoined to issue suitable instructions to that effect. This countenanced the reservation of lounge bars for officers' use only and led inevitably to a good deal of resentment on the part of other ranks, particularly in congested areas and in view of the fact that airmen of all ranks were free to go where they pleased.¹¹

Indeed, in August 1942, following parliamentary questions on the subject and several incidents in his Cardiff constituency, the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg, called for a reassessment of this policy. Although there was strong support on the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) for a continuation of the practice on the grounds of maintaining discipline, it was recognized that this was a particularly delicate matter and one that had to be resolved in tandem with the other Services.¹² Yet after inter-Service discussions, General Adam, who had represented the War Office, reported to the E.C.A.C. in October that the R.A.F. remained implacably opposed to any policy of reservation in favour of officers. Their view, it was noted, was that officers, unlike other ranks, had their own messes and when a situation arose which made it difficult for officers and

¹¹ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 73rd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)34., 21 August 1942.

¹² Ibid.

men to frequent the same bars, to avoid ill-feeling on the part of other ranks any prohibition which might be imposed should be confined to officers since this would bear less harshly upon them. Moreover, it was recorded, it would be contrary to the American forces' long established policy and custom to countenance any form of discrimination between officers and men, and to their desire to avoid providing grounds for disaffection amongst their troops.¹³

In these circumstances, bearing in mind the difficulty of issuing instructions that were at variance with the Air Ministry, and the fact that publicans could not legally put up reservation notices unless ordered by the military authorities, Adam proposed that the general R.A.F. policy in these matters should be adopted. Thus, no instructions were to be issued to prevent the joint use of bars by officers and men, but in circumstances which made it necessary in the interests of discipline to take action to segregate the ranks, local commanders were to allot certain bars to other ranks only.¹⁴ On 16 October 1942 the E.C.A.C. agreed to this revised policy.¹⁵ This was confirmed by the full Army Council at the end of the

¹³ WO 163/89, "Use of Hotels: Segregation of Officers and Other Ranks," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)136., 13 October 1942.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 81st Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)42., 16 October 1942.

month¹⁶ and communicated to the Army in December.¹⁷

Another area of contention for the War Office was the officer's right to make private medical arrangements if that was his inclination, whilst other ranks were compelled to receive treatment only in military hospitals. In fact, because it was considered that virtually all of the medical services of the country, in the form of the Service and Ministry of Health organizations, were already available to the soldier-patient who could be seen by specialists of the first rank, and through difficulties over such matters as the continuity of medical histories, convalescence and establishing the time at which a patient became fit for duty, this policy was reaffirmed in October 1941.¹⁸

However, in a paper to the E.C.A.C. in October 1942, the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Frederick Bovenschen, identified this as a particular area that was open to criticism in that there was one law for officers and another for other ranks, and that in view of the fact that there were men in the ranks who had demanded the facilities open to officers, for "political and domestic"

¹⁶ WO 163/51, Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(42)5., 28 October 1942.

¹⁷ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 90th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)51., 18 December 1942.

¹⁸ WO 163/89, "Medical Arrangements: Officers and Other Ranks," Memorandum by P.U.S., E.C.A.C./P(42)137., 14 October 1942.

reasons it would be desirable to eliminate this differentiation.¹⁹ The first inclination of General Adam, who as Adjutant-General had responsibility for Army Medical Services, was to recommend that this privilege be withdrawn from officers. Not only was it contended that patients were generally returned to duty more quickly under military rather than private treatment, but it was feared that disaffection could be created if wealthy soldiers were given access to better conditions, if not better treatment, than their less affluent comrades.²⁰ In view, though, of the wariness of the E.C.A.C. over the implications both in terms of the extra military staff and accommodation that would be required to care for the ten per cent of officers who utilized the private sector, and the problems involved in enforcing surgical treatment upon officers who might have less confidence in military doctors than those of their own choosing,²¹ it was considered, on reflection, that the differentiation should be eliminated by offering the officers' privilege to other ranks. This option, it was argued by Adam, at least offered equality of opportunity to soldiers as well as having the positive advantage of being in line with the policy of the other two Services. It was also doubted

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 82nd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)43., 23 October 1942.

whether in the final analysis the imposition of a common source of medical treatment upon all ranks could be supported in law.²² On 20 November the E.C.A.C. agreed to the change²³ and the new regulations came into effect at the beginning of 1943.²⁴

Perhaps the most glaring case of insupportable privilege which came to light within the War Office concerned the extraordinarily comfortable lifestyle officers were able to enjoy on the troopships, whilst other ranks often had to endure conditions of abject squalor in the cramped lower decks. As one soldier observed:

One might have thought that conditions on a troopship would involve a degree of propinquity that would induce a socially levelling effect such as occurred among civilians in Britain during the Blitz. But instead the officers maintained as distinct a stratification as possible, and sometimes attempted to rationalize it as being necessary for military purposes, which was absolute poppycock.²⁵

Indeed, by the beginning of 1942 Army morale reports were detecting a good deal of bitterness on the part of the soldiers which was undermining relations between officers

²² WO 163/89, "Medical Arrangements: Officers and Other Ranks," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)47., 16 November 1942.

²³ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 86th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)47., 20 November 1942.

²⁴ WO 163/90, Minutes of the 95th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(43)5., 29 January 1943.

²⁵ Imperial War Museum, Forde Papers, typescript narrative by L.-Cpl. N. A. Forde entitled "Nobody Gave a Damn," p. 94.

and men. One report observed:

The wide difference between the accommodation, food, and general amenities of officers and other ranks on board ship is frequently mentioned, sometimes with great resentment that such a state of affairs should be allowed in this democratic age.²⁶

Another concluded:

It was easy to explain to the men that trooping was an operation of war and that their intense discomfort was inevitable and must be accepted in the same spirit as discomfort in the front line; but it was not so easy to justify, in view of this explanation, the luxurious quarters and six course dinners enjoyed by officers in the same ships.²⁷

The military authorities took action to improve matters. In the Spring of 1942 an investigation of conditions on troopships was undertaken. As a result of this, the shipping companies undertook to reduce the accommodation allotted to officers and officers' messing scales were cut. This was followed by a further cut towards the end of the year. Moreover, six inspectors of troopships were appointed to monitor conditions and efforts were made to improve the amenities for troops on the ships.²⁸

²⁶ WO 163/88, Morale Report, January 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942.

²⁷ WO 163/52, Morale Report, November 1942-January 1943, A.C./G(43)10., 7 April 1943.

²⁸ WO 163/52, A.C./G(43)10; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Adam Papers [hereafter Adam], Adam VIII, typescript narrative by Gen. Sir Ronald Adam on "Various Administrative Aspects of the Army during the Second World War," 1963, chap. 5, p. 9.

However, whilst efforts were made to narrow some of the inequalities between officers and men, the most pressing problem for the War Office lay in what it came to regard as the poor standard of man-management on the part of its junior officers. Whilst prepared to concede the necessity of officers leading a somewhat detached life from their own and of following even the worst leader, it was clear that better educated than ever before, less willing to participate in artificial manifestations of respect to those above them, and generally more socially sophisticated, the wartime recruits were going to require tactful and sympathetic management if their willing cooperation was to be maintained. As one soldier noted:

In the old Army there was a blind obedience, the result of strict discipline, which was often confused with loyalty to one's officers and to the Army. Today there is a much more questioning quality in the loyalties of the other ranks. The N.C.O.s. and men nowadays are not blindly loyal to their senior officers just because the latter happen to hold the King's commission. They first wish to satisfy themselves that their officers are thoroughly capable, and, as intelligent men, they take mental note of every action, look and word of their seniors, and assess them either as simply officers who have to be saluted or as good officers whom they would follow to hell and back.²⁹

These sentiments were recognized by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Ironside, when he stressed to senior officers in August 1940 that in view

²⁹ quoted in C. W. Valentine, *The Human Factor in the Army* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1954), p. 62.

of the new type of soldier the Army was receiving, greater care would be necessary in the handling of men.³⁰

Yet although it might well have been thought that the new wartime officers, all having served a period in the ranks, would have brought a new degree of sympathy and understanding to their relations with their men, it was ironic that as the war progressed not only did many of the products of the "democratization" of the officer corps fail to display much capacity for man-management, but they seemed to go to great lengths to distance themselves from their charges. Indeed, there seemed to be almost an inverted social snobbery on the part of officers once they had been elevated to commissioned rank. One soldier wrote of "beardless young O.C.T.U. products, who are much too delighted with their new uniforms seriously to bother about such trivial matters as morale."³¹

The issue was thrust into the public domain by Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Bingham, the commander of the 168th Officer Cadet Training Unit, who argued in a controversial letter to *The Times* in January 1941 that the problem of man-management was the direct result of commissioning men who did not have the "old school-tie"

³⁰ WO 199/1649, Minutes of the G.O.C.-in-C's Conference, 7 August 1940.

³¹ Socialist Subaltern, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 21 (March 1941), p. 240.

instincts for leadership and responsibility for their fellow man. "This aspect of life is completely new to them," he noted, "and they have largely fallen down in it in their capacity as Army officers."^{3 2}

Although Bingham's comments enraged left-wing opinion and forced the War Office to dismiss him on the grounds of contravening King's Regulations by publishing his views, his sentiments were echoed by many serving in the Army. "Socialist Subaltern," writing in *The New Statesman*, recorded:

Unfortunately little improvement has resulted from the gradual broadening of the basis of the officer-class, since the new grammar school officers have just as little understanding of working-class psychology as the most feudal-minded Old Etonians; indeed, they often make worse officers, or tend to assimilate the latter's general outlook without at the same time assimilating that touch of rebellious cynicism about spit-and-polish, etc., which often makes^{3 3} the old Etonian a surprisingly popular officer.

This view was corroborated by the author Alan Wood in the Royal Artillery:

These imitations have all the disadvantages of the genuine product (apart from being slightly more intelligent). Instead of supplementing the Old Etonian officer with the qualities he lacks, they merely duplicate his deficiencies. They have none of his advantages. They have not shown their patriotism by joining up the moment war broke

^{3 2} Lt.-Col. R. C. Bingham, letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 15 January 1941, p. 5.

^{3 3} Socialist Subaltern, p. 240.

out: they are conscripts like everybody else. They have no snob appeal in the form of breeding, poise or wealth; since most of them are unsuccessful members of the professional classes, they have no particular knack of handling men. These are the typical cadets you find in the O.C.T.U.'s today, the type whom Colonel Bingham described as being worse leaders of soldiers than men with the old school tie: and there is not the slightest doubt that he was right.³⁴

Even the Editor of *The Tribune* belatedly conceded:

COLONEL BINGHAM has got his; and the Pressmen have settled down to roost like rooks at evening. Now the noise is over I can say that after all there was an element of truth in what he said. I did not say so before, because it was only just that the Right should be punished for an infraction of discipline, for once. The Left cops it quite often enough.³⁵

However, whilst both Left and Right were agreed that the middle classes were no good, as the war went on the War Office also became concerned about officers who should have displayed the "old school-tie" instincts. As one Army morale report noted:

It is, perhaps, significant that one of the Commanders who register complaints in this matter is Commander of a Guards Brigade Group: presumably the regiments under his command draw upon promising sources, yet he finds that 'many young officers on joining have no idea of man-management.'³⁶

Thus, whilst assessing that the shortcomings of Army

³⁴ Boomerang [Alan Wood], *Bless 'Em All. An Analysis of the Morale, Efficiency and Leadership of the British Army* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1942), p. 52.

³⁵ Editorial, *The Tribune*, no. 215 (1941), p. 4.

³⁶ WO 163/52, A.C./G(43)10.

officers were due in part to a lack of suitable officer material arising from the fact that most candidates for commissions did not have a background which helped them to adopt the right attitude towards their men, the military authorities also came to the conclusion that they were the result of a selfishness and negligence on the part of young officers from whatever background they were drawn. In fact, what came to light was a basic ignorance of the concerns of the majority of men serving in the ranks which often made the young officer shy and uncertain of the right approach to them.³⁷

One of the interesting by-products of this issue was a call by some military commentators for an extension of a public school training to wider sections of the community,³⁸ even though it was a criticism on the part of others that the "old school tie" training was out of touch with the social realities of the modern world, and often left its products with an inbred snobbery and little knowledge of the lives of men in industrial occupations.³⁹ However, regardless of the educational debate that was taking place, by 1942 Army morale reports were portraying a worrying catalogue of mismanagement on the part of young officers. "Several Commanders report,"

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Editorial, *Army Quarterly* 42 (April 1941), p. 14.

³⁹ Hutchison, pp. 72-73.

one noted, "that young and newly joined officers are 'woefully ignorant' of man-management and lack interest in their men."⁴⁰ In similar vein another commented: "It is evident that there is still a deplorably large proportion of officers who fail to care properly for their men's welfare and to inspire their men's respect."⁴¹

For the War Office the military implications were clear. Not only was poor man-management highlighted as being one of the principal causes of absence without leave,⁴² but was seen as being the most important factor in the growing gulf between officers and men which was threatening to undermine the solidarity of the Army. As one morale report concluded:

The problem is largely one of officering: the troops are ready enough to feel friendliness, respect, and admiration for the right type of officer.... The troops' letters show, however, that such a relationship is far from universal.⁴³

"In far too many cases, it continued, officers "are looked on as a race apart."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ WO 163/51, Morale Report, February-May 1942, A.C./G(42)20., 12 June 1942.

⁴¹ WO 163/161, M.C./P(42)1.

⁴² WO 163/88, "Morale in the Army," Note by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942.

⁴³ WO 163/161, M.C./P(42)3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Indeed, the view was put forward by General Paget, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, to the Army Council in 1942 that the key to the remedy of low morale in the Army and to improving its military efficiency lay in "the training of a corps of officers, whose efficiency, example and instinctive interest in their work and the troops would compel the respect of the men."^{4 5}

The War Office took a number of measures to improve matters. Primarily, the introduction of the War Office Selection Boards by General Adam in the Spring and Summer of 1942 was conceived as a means of contributing to an improvement in the standard of man-management and a specific group procedure was designed to evaluate the ability of potential officers to manage their men. Henry Harris, a psychiatrist attached to the Boards, described this:

The Human Problems Session is a series of 8 stress interviews in which candidates - one as officer, the other a stooge or "other rank" - dramatise the handling of personal or disciplinary problems. Each candidate functions once as an Officer and once as a Stooge. The group sit round in a semi-circle and criticise and discuss the handling of each situation before going on to the next.

The ordinary problems that arise in any relationship between officer and subordinate, manager and employee are dramatised: and the purpose of the session is to induce each candidate to project his spontaneous social attitudes so that one may note his appreciation of interpersonal relationships, the degree of spontaneity and effective improvisation he is

^{4 5} WO 163/51, Minutes of the 14th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(42)3., 11 August 1942.

likely to show in handling them and the extent to which his own attitudes are naturally group cohesive,⁴⁶ group disruptive, group dependent or isolate.

Designed to test a potential officer's empathy, encouragement, firmness, tact, bringing others into the picture, and motivation or identification with the field of activity,⁴⁷ Harris was in no doubt as to the value of this facet of the selection process:

One's own conclusion - after being allowed to participate in many hundreds of these sessions at 7 WOSB Winchester, 10 WOSB Chester and 5 WOSB Wormley - was that this was possibly the most valuable single technique in WOSB procedure.⁴⁸

In addition, greater emphasis was placed on management skills in the training of officers. Although a few lectures on the "art of leadership" were given to officer cadets, in the early stages of the war the five-monthly average period of training at Officer Cadet Training Units (O.C.T.U.s) comprised a strict regime given over largely to the inculcation of physical endurance and technical military efficiency. The position was further complicated by the fact that O.C.T.U. commanding officers were largely left to develop their own idioms and so there was little uniformity of

⁴⁶ Henry Harris, *The Group Approach to Leadership-Testing* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 123.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 131-134

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

practice.⁴⁹

However, after studying the Army morale reports, in the Spring of 1942 Adam asked the Director of Military Training at the War Office to re-examine their methods and curricula with a view to improving man-management.⁵⁰ During the Summer and Autumn revised methods of training were put into place. After having been selected for officer training, cadets were sent in the first instance to new pre-O.C.T.U. Training Centres. There candidates underwent an intensive course of basic military instruction and testing, and the time a candidate spent at these centres, no more than eight weeks at the maximum, was determined by his state of training on arrival. Not only did this have the advantage of helping to ensure that all candidates arrived at O.C.T.U.s at a common standard of elementary fitness and training, and that time and space were not wasted in training men who would eventually be found unfit for commissioning, but it allowed for a respectively shortened O.C.T.U. course, reduced to an average of four months, to concentrate its efforts much more in developing the skills required for man-management.⁵¹

⁴⁹ WO 277/36, "Training in the Army," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. W. Gibb, 1961, pp. 6, 254, 263.

⁵⁰ WO 163/88, E.C.A.C./P(42)37.

⁵¹ WO 277/36, Gibb, pp. 259-260.

At a conference with O.C.T.U. commanders in April 1942 the new approach was outlined. Although cadets were still to be encouraged to take a pride in their physique, appearance and military skill and knowledge, a new bias, it was noted, had to be given to O.C.T.U. training in general. Steps had to be taken, it was stressed, to engender confidence and bring out personality, inculcate a sense of responsibility, and improve the ability of cadets to handle men.⁵² This change in emphasis was reflected in instructions that a more informal and discursive atmosphere was to be created in which candidates were positively encouraged to make bold decisions and give solutions to problems that were unorthodox. Greater provision was also to be made for cadets to command each other on a day-to-day basis.⁵³ Moreover, a new standardized O.C.T.U. syllabus was adopted, coming into effect in September,⁵⁴ which set aside specific training time for the study of management and made this part of the core curriculum for whatever Arm an officer was to serve in.⁵⁵

Arising out of this, some new training techniques were developed. As many cadets had never spoken in public

⁵² WO 32/10466, Minutes of a Conference to discuss Officer Production, 10 April 1942.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ WO 163/51, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(42)34., September 1942.

⁵⁵ WO 277/36, Gibb, pp. 254-255.

before, all were expected to deliver a "lecturette," a ten-minute talk to their "platoon" on any subject of their choosing, in order to hone communication skills.⁵⁶ The use of plays was encouraged in order to dramatize the various human problems that the officer would confront.⁵⁷ Army psychiatrists were also dispatched to O.C.T.U.s to lecture on the psychology of morale and leadership.⁵⁸ One such specialist, Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. M. Wilson, compiled notes for those who might be called upon to discuss these questions. "Officers and men," he wrote, "cannot be attached and removed like articles of equipment. A unit is a living organism in which grafting is as difficult as in trees."⁵⁹ Of further note was the production, at the suggestion of Army psychiatrists, of a special film for officer cadets in 1943, entitled *The Way Ahead*. This illustrated the growth of the officer-man relationship and the emotional rewards of the officer's duties. Although eventually made by Two Cities, an external commercial company, it was written according to psychiatric prescription and was, in the opinion of

⁵⁶ Capt. R. Bernays [hereafter Bernays (1)], "Reflections on a Tour of O.C.T.U.s," *Army Quarterly* 48 (April 1944), p. 95.

⁵⁷ WO 163/53, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(44)41., November 1944.

⁵⁸ Privy Council Office, *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services* (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 58.

⁵⁹ Robert H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 198.

Brigadier J. R. Rees, suggestive of a way in which psychiatry could play a positive role in solving some of the problems of social reconstruction.⁶⁰

Perhaps most significantly, the military authorities recognized that methods of leadership needed to be modified in accordance with the needs of the wartime recruit. The changes were incorporated in two pamphlets for officers which were expected to become the officers' "bibles" in these matters; *The Soldier's Welfare*, first issued by the War Office in July 1941, and *Comrades in Arms*, produced in June 1942. These publications were notable for being the first official attempts by the Army to explain in simple form not only the importance of man-management, but how results could best be achieved.⁶¹

Major R. A. C. Radcliffe, a wartime officer working on Adam's staff, provided an illuminating commentary on these works for *Army Quarterly*. Although Radcliffe noted that twenty-five years previously the industrial age had largely destroyed the feudal relationship between master and man, the majority of soldiers during the First World War, he argued, had been content to receive orders and obey them without much questioning, and the officer who

⁶⁰ *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services*, p. 57; John Rawlings Rees, *The Shaping of Psychiatry by War* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945), p. 88.

⁶¹ WO 277/4, "Army Welfare," War Office Monograph compiled by Brig. M. C. Morgan, 1953, p. 39.

had shown his men reasonable kindness and had looked after their physical requirements had usually been successful in establishing the right relationship. However, he recorded, the results of popular education and other social improvements, the greater suspicion in society towards those who represented a ruling class in any form, and the more complex nature of social life in general had made the officer's task of establishing a good working relationship with his men a far more difficult and demanding one than his father's had been in 1914-18, and new methods were consequently required. These publications outlined the methods the officer needed to adopt in these changed circumstances.⁶²

A typical sentence in *Comrades in Arms* seemed almost revolutionary in its wording when it stated:

The army is getting older men who have been possibly keen trade unionists with strong political views as well; very often they will come into the army suspicious and resentful of its authority, and it will be necessary to understand their point of view and make the necessary allowances.⁶³

Indeed, whilst in bygone eras officers might have addressed soldiers in a rather condescending manner, any suspicion of patronage was now frowned upon. *The*

⁶² Maj. R. A. C. Radcliffe, "Officer-Man Relationships," *Army Quarterly* 46 (May 1943), pp. 113-114.

⁶³ *Comrades in Arms*; quoted in Tom Harrisson, "The British Soldier: Changing Attitudes and Ideas," *The British Journal of Psychology* 35 (January 1945), p. 36.

Soldier's Welfare warned officers not to talk down to their men, to use plain words of one or two syllables, to avoid eloquence and never to use sarcasm.⁶⁴ In addition, *Comrades in Arms* stressed the importance of always keeping in mind the well educated in the ranks and noted that the officer who showed his awareness and appreciation of their better education, both by the way he talked to them and by the way he employed them, would turn potential rebels into loyal and useful soldiers.⁶⁵

Furthermore, whilst officers might have formerly regarded the soldier's place as being "not to reason why but to do and die,"⁶⁶ *Comrades in Arms* now instructed officers that it was necessary to explain the reasons for orders if the men's full cooperation was to be achieved.⁶⁷ *The Soldier's Welfare* advised officers that the soldiers' views should be positively sought over most matters affecting their welfare, and that such action strengthened discipline and was not a sign of weakness.⁶⁸ *Comrades in Arms* even encouraged officers to take part in "free for all" discussions with their men over particularly controversial issues as a means of defusing

⁶⁴ War Office, *The Soldier's Welfare*, 16 July 1941, p. 10.

⁶⁵ *Comrades in Arms*; cited in Radcliffe, p. 117.

⁶⁶ Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," 1854.

⁶⁷ *Comrades in Arms*; cited in Radcliffe, p. 117.

⁶⁸ *The Soldier's Welfare*, p. 4.

discontent and developing a sense of camaraderie.⁶⁹

Moreover, whilst officers might once have assumed that soldiers could be left to amuse themselves in their spare time, *The Soldier's Welfare* now informed them that not only did they have an obligation to uphold the traditions of the Army by playing games with the men, but they had a positive duty to arrange entertainment and promote schemes of education as well.⁷⁰ On top of this, whilst officers had always been expected to provide some sort of advice for soldiers with personal or domestic worries, *The Soldier's Welfare* advised them that their role in this respect assumed a far greater importance than ever before. Officers were encouraged to acquaint themselves with the various welfare organizations to which a soldier could apply for assistance, allot a certain time in the week when they could be approached privately on these matters, give practical help and advice when they could, and to remember that it simply helped a man just to talk through his troubles with a sympathetic listener.⁷¹

In summing up his commentary, Radcliffe recorded that if one compared the officer-man relationship in the current Army with the relationship at any other period of its history, the conclusions were clear. Firstly, the

⁶⁹ *Comrades in Arms*; cited in Radcliffe, p. 118.

⁷⁰ *The Soldier's Welfare*, pp. 13-17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

relationship was more difficult and complex, but, if achieved, was more akin to real comradeship. Secondly, the relationship demanded more work for the junior officer, but at the same time he received more help and guidance in doing it.⁷²

What the guidance the officer now received demonstrated, he argued, was that the Army had not ignored developments that had been taking place in civilian society. On the contrary, he noted:

... realizing that an army recruited both in officers and men from civilians must to a large extent reflect the ways of living of those civilians, it has studied those ways, and then shaped its methods of dealing with them accordingly."⁷³

Yet what was implicit in this guidance and what the Army was trying to instil in its officers, he continued, was that the secret of success in modern leadership lay not only in working with the men and getting them to cooperate with their leader, rather than just issuing orders that had to be obeyed, but in understanding and appreciating their men's mental and emotional needs as well as their physical ones.⁷⁴

Whilst these initiatives were obviously of vital importance to the establishment of a close relationship

⁷²Radcliffe, p. 122.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 116, 119.

between officers and men, of particular note also was an element of social idealism in military thinking. As Radcliffe concluded:

Certainly it is my firm belief and hope that the officer-man relationship in the army today is laying the foundation of a better and healthier community spirit in this country after the war.⁷⁵

As the war went on there was evidence of an improvement in the relationship between officers and men. The Army morale report for August to October 1944 noted that "both Commander's reports and censorship extracts indicate that relations are generally satisfactory."⁷⁶ Again, at the beginning of 1945 it was recorded that "commanders generally are well satisfied with the relations between officers and men."⁷⁷

However, whilst the relationship may have improved, questions have to be asked about the extent to which the gulf between the two was really eradicated. Although the War Office may have tried to revise some of the inequalities between officers and men, it was clear that officers continued to receive many privileges denied to the rank and file. Whilst officers were entitled to travel first class on the railways, other ranks were

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

⁷⁶ WO 163/54, Morale Report, August-October 1944, A.C./G(45)2., 17 February 1945.

⁷⁷ WO 163/45, Morale Report, November 1944-January 1945, A.C./G(45)12., 4 July 1945.

consigned to third-class carriages, and often, it was recorded, were barred from empty first-class accommodation despite the great overcrowding on the trains.⁷⁸ Although a soldier could only buy sports clothes from shops and had to have a certificate signed by his officer to that effect, it was noted that officers could buy all sorts of civilian clothing merely by certifying that they were for their own personal use.⁷⁹ Whilst restrictions on the use of Army transport were in place in order to conserve fuel and rubber, it continued to be alleged that officers were misusing vehicles for their own private leisure pursuits.⁸⁰ Although women were conscripted to war work, the number of officers' wives who managed to escape being called up and followed their husbands around the country was described as a major scandal of the war.⁸¹ Even in the administration of justice in the Army there appeared to be anomalies. This prompted a debate in parliament in the Summer of 1942 over different penalties being applied to officers and men for similar offences, and although the War Office refuted all accusations of leniency, it was admitted that

⁷⁸ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 379 (1941-42), col. 636; *Ibid.*, vol. 397 (1943-44), col. 2040.

⁷⁹ Private RAPC, "Soldier and Citizen," *The Tribune*, no. 279 (1942), p. 10.

⁸⁰ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 376 (1941-42), col. 615; *Ibid.*, vol. 379 (1941-42), cols. 1221-1222.

⁸¹ Captain X, p. 47.

unlike other ranks who could be sentenced to a period of detention, the Army Act only allowed officers to be reprimanded or dismissed, and that in dismissing an officer from the Service consideration had to be given to the fact that an officer's chances of securing a civilian livelihood would be severely prejudiced.⁸²

What was perhaps most significant in this respect, however, was that despite the restrictions of wartime the fundamental rights of officers to a separate mess, to be valeted by batmen, to more comfortable accommodation when it could be secured, and to a better general standard of day-to-day living than the men, remained unchallenged. This factor was particularly stressed by William Shebbeare. Writing in 1944 he noted:

The whole daily routine of an officer is far more luxurious than that of his men. He gets up an hour later, he is called by a batman who brings him a cup of tea and hot water, lays out his clothes and cleans his uniform. Throughout the day he eats his meals not in a drab mess-room but in the more comfortable atmosphere of the officer's mess dining room, where he is waited on by the mess waiters. He can sit and read the papers in an armchair by the fire in the ante-room. And so on. I know that when I first became an officer I was amazed at the incredible increase in my comforts. This comfort⁸³ is a serious barrier between officers and men.

In his opinion the greater comforts the officer was accorded had two important implications. Firstly, they

⁸² *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 381 (1941-42), col. 1047.

⁸³ Captain X, pp. 50-51.

quickly made an officer forget the relative discomforts he had suffered a few months previously as a soldier in the ranks. Secondly, they tended to instil in the men the impression that officers were pampered, disliked undergoing discomforts and were never really "in the war". He outlined his solution to the problem:

I do not think the way to destroy this barrier is necessarily to reduce the standard of living of the officers: I would much rather see it done by raising the standard of living of the men. In the squadron I am in, every troop has a furnished quiet room, with games and papers and a fire. Some of these rooms are more comfortable than anything to be found at the officers' mess. But however it is done, somehow or other officers must stop leading cushy lives by comparison with their men.⁸⁴

Interestingly, Shebbeare's analysis was shared by another military commentator, C. R. N. Routh, who argued in an article in *Army Quarterly* in July 1944:

The standard of living in the modern army will probably have to be raised: so long as the material comforts of the officers' mess are so infinitely greater than those of the private soldier, so long will there be some gulf between officers and men.⁸⁵

Significantly, this was one of the points raised by the Parliamentary Labour Party Defence and Services Group in a submission to the War Office in December 1946. "There should be," it was recorded, "a general lifting of the

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

⁸⁵ C. R. N. Routh, "The Public Schools and the Army," *Army Quarterly* 48 (July 1944), p. 209.

standard of life and conditions of the O.R. nearer to that of the officer."⁸⁶ Although after consideration of the matter the Army Council agreed that the private soldier was entitled to a reasonable standard of life and conditions, and that improvements would be made to that end, it was perhaps a sign of the Army's post-war retrenchment that it was concluded that it would be neither "possible" nor "desirable" to attempt to assimilate the standards of officers and other ranks.⁸⁷

What was perhaps most important, however, in the continuing gulf between officers and men, was that despite evidence of an eventual improvement in the standard of man-management of young officers,⁸⁸ questions have to be raised about the extent to which the new training and guidance given to officers in these matters took full effect. Indeed, Army morale reports continued to give the War Office grounds for concern over the standard of man-management of its young officers. The report for May to July 1943 noted that eight commanders were of the opinion that the standard of care and interest fell short of what

⁸⁶ WO 163/55, "Proposed Reforms for the Armed Forces," Memorandum by the Parliamentary Labour Party Defence and Services Group, 20 November 1946, Appendix "A" to A.C./P(46)19., 6 December 1946.

⁸⁷ WO 163/56, "Reforms for the Armed Forces Proposed by the Defence and Services Group of the Parliamentary Labour Party," Note by P.U.S., A.C./G(47)1., 7 January 1947.

⁸⁸ WO 163/53, Morale Report, February-April 1944, A.C./G(44)31., 22 August 1944; WO 163/53, Morale Report, May-July 1944, A.C./G(44)39., 15 November 1944.

it should have been.⁸⁹ The report for August to October 1943 recorded that whilst soldiers were as ready as ever to appreciate the right type of officer, such officers were not as numerous as might be hoped.⁹⁰ The report for November 1943 to January 1944 stressed the "deplorable state of man-management prevailing," and pointed out:

This is, no doubt, especially true of officers in technical arms and in large establishments where the rapid turnover of personnel makes it difficult for the right relationship to be established; but there is no doubt that a certain unjustified complacency prevails even in units where such extenuating circumstances do not exist."⁹¹

The feelings of soldiers were summed up by the serving National-Liberal M.P., Richard Bernays, who argued in an article in *Army Quarterly* in August 1943 that whatever guidance and instructions cadets received in these matters, young officers still displayed an alarming lack of interest in or concern for their men, and that the first feeling a recruit had towards his officer was that there was still "an apparently unbridgeable gulf between them." In fact, he recorded:

What impressed me was how little practical expression I found of the Army Council's intentions with regard to the relationship

⁸⁹ WO 163/52, Morale Report, May-July 1943, A.C./G(43)27., 5 October 1943.

⁹⁰ WO 163/53, Morale Report, August-October 1943, A.C./G(44)4., 11 January 1944.

⁹¹ WO 163/53, Morale Report, November 1943-January 1944, A.C./G(44)22., 23 May 1944.

between officers and men. These are set out admirably in those two War Office publications, 'Comrades in Arms' and 'The Soldiers Welfare.' If that spirit of sympathy and understanding really permeated the atmosphere of the Training Camp, then there would be little cause for complaint.⁹²

In accounting for these difficulties, the military authorities continued to highlight the shortcomings of the officer material they received. This was particularly stressed by Lieutenant-Colonel John Sparrow, Assistant Adjutant-General at the War Office, who argued after the war that whilst the lack of an "old school tie" background with its traditions of leadership certainly prevented a very large proportion of officers from understanding and practising the art of man-management, the "old school tie" officer suffered correspondingly because of a lack of awareness of the background from which his men were drawn. He concluded:

The response of the regimental soldier to the demands made upon him is an indication less, perhaps, of the degree of efficiency achieved by the War Office, than of the quality of society that produced him. The War Office had to work on the material that came to its hand. Of this, it is enough to say that the shortage of good officer material was perhaps the gravest of all enemies to military morale, and 'man-management' was the lesson that a large proportion of officers found it hardest to learn.⁹³

However, what was perhaps most significant, and what the

⁹² Lieut. R. Bernays, "Man-Officer Relationships," *Army Quarterly* 46 (August 1943), p. 249.

⁹³ WO 277/16, "Morale," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. H. A. Sparrow, 1949, p. 21.

military authorities themselves came to recognize, was that no matter what training and guidance in man-management a young officer was given, the most important influence on his performance in this respect was the example and supervision of the senior officers in his unit, and in particular his commanding officer. As the Army morale report for November 1943 to January 1944 itself admitted: "It is upon C.Os. and company commanders that the chief responsibility for the state of man-management must rest."⁹⁴

Indeed, despite the constant efforts of the War Office to impress upon commanding officers the need to develop good man-management practices in their units, a process that led to General Adam issuing a special letter on the subject in June 1943,⁹⁵ the problem was that many of these officers, the majority of whom were regulars, seemed unable to grasp either the importance of man-management in a wartime citizen Army, or the new techniques that were required. Not only did morale reports acknowledge that some of these officers lacked an awareness of the needs of the wartime soldier, but that some in themselves were not really interested in their men and therefore did not take pains to ensure that their

⁹⁴ WO 163/53, A.C./G(44)22.

⁹⁵ Adam V/4, letter from A.G. to Corps District, Divisional, A.A. Group, District and Area Commanders, June 1943.

junior officers took an interest in them.⁹⁶ Moreover, some clearly resented the methods of man-management that the War Office was trying to promote. One officer, Major M. J. P. M. Corbally, wrote of his concern that the position and authority of the officer had been undermined by gutter-inspired ideologies which decried those qualities in a man which raised him above his fellows.⁹⁷ Instead, he argued:

The Cadet must be suitably influenced and educated in the idea that, by taking the King's Commission, he has removed himself completely and irrevocably from the life, ideals and interests of his erstwhile comrades in the ranks; that never again can he be 'one of them' and that, from now on, his attitude and outlook, code of manners and behaviour, and standards generally, must be entirely different.⁹⁸

For William Shebbeare, the problem was due more than anything to the social background of these officers:

The regular officers now remaining in the army are admittedly the cream of the pre-war regulars, but they all share the outlook common to all regulars. These officers who remain all hold the rank of Major or above. It is therefore they who set the whole tone of how other officers behave.... It is not simply that these officers belong politically to the Right. It is not simply that they look on trade unions as trouble making organisations without understanding how great is the protection a trade union gives to a working man. Nor is it just that they have no idea what life was like for the present-day soldier who was

⁹⁶ WO 163/53, A.C./G(44)4.

⁹⁷ Maj. M. J. P. M. Corbally, "The Officer-Producing Class," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 91 (May 1946), pp. 205.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

unemployed and on the Means Test in the days when his officers were pig-sticking and playing polo. It is above all that the combination of these things makes the average regular officer - good fellow though he is - incapable of seeing things as his men see them, of understanding what his men are thinking, of knowing how things will strike his men. It is for this reason that the men are apt to look on their officers as a totally different species of human being from themselves.⁹⁹

In illustration of this, he continued:

After I had been some months in the army, I and a number of my fellow-soldiers who were considered 'potential officers' were given occasional lectures by senior officers. I remember my amazement at hearing one Major tell us: 'After the war fox-hunting people must be ready to make welcome in the hunting field rich men from the towns who have little knowledge of the country life. It is no good laughing as we usually do at *nouveaux riches* who have made their own fortunes in trade. If we are going to keep hunting going, we must depend on subscriptions from these people, and so I feel we should be ready to welcome them and make friends with them.' And then, as if feeling he had said something shockingly unorthodox and seditious, he added, with a delightful smile I have never forgotten, 'I don't know whether you think what I'm saying is terribly socialistic.' The more you ponder this remark, the more I think you will see it to be a sublime example of how some officers can fail to comprehend any of the social events of our time.¹⁰⁰

Whatever the shortcomings of new wartime officer material, as one Adjutant of an O.C.T.U. argued in 1944: "Our cadets have got the right instincts in them. What I am afraid of is what will happen to them when they come

⁹⁹ Captain X, pp. 45-46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

under some senior officers I know of in the Army."¹⁰¹
Another officer wrote on the same lines at the end of the war: "The Army still gives too much authority to men who believe that officers and other ranks are made of different clay."¹⁰²

Certainly, the Army learnt from its wartime experiences and more effort was employed in the post-war era in the training and guidance of Regular and National Service officers in man-management. In January 1949 the Army Manpower Committee pronounced that this was a subject fully dealt with in the Army training system.¹⁰³ Yet not only did one survey reveal that by 1960 only some fourteen hours over two years were devoted to matters of leadership in the Sandhurst syllabus, which half of the cadets found "of little use" or "useless,"¹⁰⁴ but one young officer, Simon Raven, could write with some incredulity of his experiences of the post-war Army, not only of officer training continuing to create a distinct class of human being, naturally designed to impose its will on all inferior classes, but of fellow officers who described their men as "pets" who needed to be humoured

¹⁰¹ Bernays (1), p. 96.

¹⁰² WO 163/281, "Why I Wouldn't Sign On Again," published article by Hubert Cole, n.d. [but 1946].

¹⁰³ WO 163/515, Army Manpower Committee. Final Report. January 1949.

¹⁰⁴ J. E. Adair, "New Trends in Leadership and Management Training," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* 112 (November 1967), p. 317.

with sugar and whipped when disobedient.¹⁰⁵

During the war the War Office was compelled to make important changes in terms of the officer-man relationship. Whilst relations in the pre-war Army had been characterized by inequalities in living conditions and other privileges accorded to commissioned and non-commissioned ranks, and by a style of leadership that remained essentially "autocratic" in nature, the military authorities sought not only to reduce some of the more indefensible inequalities, but to inspire in its officers a more "democratic" style of leadership which, in the view of Tom Harrisson, "set the seal of approval on the fullest *human* associations in place of the formal."¹⁰⁶ Together these initiatives seemed like a blueprint for the breaking down of the old feudal relationship between officers and men. However, whilst Major Radcliffe argued that the Army was setting "a practical example to the country in the true meaning of social service and community in a modern democracy,"¹⁰⁷ there were those who would have begged to differ. As one wartime soldier, James Rochford, recalls:

I vividly remember walking with 4 other mates along a street in Brussels shortly after the liberation when we turned a corner and saw all

¹⁰⁵ Simon Raven, "Perish by the Sword," *Encounter* 12 (May 1959), pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁶ Harrisson, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁷ Radcliffe, p. 122.

these restaurants and bars. We hurried along to get a nice glass of cool wine. As we reached the corners of two buildings 2 MPs stopped us and asked us couldn't we read and pointed to a yellow circle with a blue line across the middle. Above it was the words 'OUT OF BOUNDS TO OTHER RANKS.' We were turned back by the MPs whose specific job was just to make sure no 'cattle' got through. As we turned away I saw officers sat at the pavement tables pouring champagne out for their whores, it was then I finally realised that all that guff about fighting a war for freedom and democracy was a load of bullshit. Nothing would ever change no matter how many thousands of us died nothing would alter.¹⁰⁸

As an adjunct to this, it is perhaps worth recording the post-war findings of the Report into the Army's Working Day in 1948, which, in its assessment of officer-man relations, not only drew attention to the existence of "the many barriers setting up group distinctions and militating against group understanding," which it was argued, "results in ineffective leadership due to mutual ignorance of each group and lack of confidence of either group in the other," but also came to the reluctant conclusion that "the average young Officer has little or no interest in the N.C.Os and men comprising his own small command." "Time after time," it was recorded, "we heard with almost monotonous regularity - 'They don't take no interest in us' from the men."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ James Rochford, letter to the author, May 1988.

¹⁰⁹ WO 163/497, Second Report. Army Working Day Investigating Team, 17 October 1948.

6. WELFARE

A further area that the military authorities were forced to focus their attention on, and one linked to the relationship between officers and their men, was the whole question of welfare provision for the Army. During the 1914-18 war voluntary bodies such as the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association and the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmens' Forces Association acted on their own initiative to supplement the efforts of formations in providing certain rudimentary welfare services for the troops. However, in the inter-war Regular Army, composed as it was of long-service troops living in static conditions, the welfare of the soldier continued to be regarded, as it always had been, as first and foremost a matter for units and regimental officers. Indeed, not only did no official welfare organization exist in the Army, but what official welfare provision was made was limited just to a few basic amenities and recreational facilities such as sports grounds by the Army Sports Control Board and canteens by the NAAFI. Little or nothing, for instance, was provided officially to help cope with a soldier's personal or domestic problems.¹ Moreover, as one officer recalled: "Only about fifty per cent. of Regular officers in time of peace in

¹Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 32/14569, "The Place of the Army Welfare Service in Post-War Planning," Memorandum by D.A.G.(A)., A.P.W.P./P(45)47., 2 October 1945; WO 277/4, "Army Welfare," War Office Monograph compiled by Brig. M. C. Morgan, 1953, pp. 1-2.

most units take any real interest in their men's welfare of their own volition."²

Whilst Hore-Belisha sought to promote the soldier's welfare in the late 1930s through the building of new barrack accommodation and the setting up of schools of cookery as part of the effort to stimulate recruitment,³ the introduction of conscription with the passing of the Military Training Act in the Spring of 1939 did serve to initiate debate within the War Office on the creation of a new welfare organization in the Army. Anticipating the special welfare needs of militiamen, not only for improved amenities and recreational facilities but also for special help with personal and domestic problems arising out of their conscription, it was proposed by the then Adjutant-General, General Sir Gordon Finlayson, and Major-General Adam, who in the Summer of 1939 was in post at the War Office as Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that a number of specially selected civilian officers be appointed to assist units over welfare matters; an initiative which the Deputy Director-General of the Territorial Army, Lieutenant-General Sir John Brown, pointed out, had its parallels in civil life where a welfare officer was appointed to all large works and

² Lt.-Col. Graham Seton Hutchison, "Selection and Education of an Officer," *Army Quarterly* 42 (April 1941), p. 73.

³ R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), pp. 46-47.

factories.⁴ However, not only was there a good deal of opposition to this proposal on the part of senior officers on the grounds that it went against the tried and trusted methods of the Service and would undermine the traditional responsibility of regimental officers for the care of their men,⁵ but further progress on this issue was halted after the government's ruling that apart from the award of War Service Grants to soldiers for whom normal Service pay and allowances were inadequate to meet family commitments, no further public monies would be available for welfare schemes.⁶ On the eve of war welfare provision was still very much geared along Regular Army lines.

Within a few weeks of the outbreak of the war, though, the War Office came to recognize that some sort of welfare organization needed to be instituted in the Army. The thousands of new recruits embodied into the Service brought with them a number of pressing welfare problems. The wartime citizen Army was different from the peacetime Regular Army in the fact that for the first time it was

⁴ WO 163/67, D.C.I.G.S. to A.G., Appendix "A" to C.C.A.C.260., 26 June 1939; WO 163/67, Minutes of a Meeting of the Standing Committee on Compulsory Military Training, Appendix "B" to C.C.A.C.260., 26 June 1939; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 3-4.

⁵ WO 163/67, Appendix "B" to C.C.A.C.260.

⁶ WO 163/67, Minutes of a Meeting of the Standing Committee on Compulsory Military Training, 12 July 1939, C.C.A.C.281., 17 July 1939; WO 163/47, Proceedings of the 26th Meeting of the Informal Army Council, 21 July 1939; WO 163/47, Proceedings of the 27th Meeting of the Informal Army Council, 4 August 1939; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 5.

cut off from all aspects of home life that were valued so highly. The lack of amenities and recreational facilities was one particular problem that played on the mind of the soldier. As William Shebbeare noted: "Ask any bachelor soldier what he most dislikes about army life and I think he will tell you that it is the lack of any home comfort, the dreariness and lack of colour."⁷ Another was the enforced separation from families which often brought with it a host of pressing personal and domestic worries. "It is surprising to hear the chaps when they talk about their homes," wrote another soldier, "many are married and have young children and even the toughest is full of concern for his wife and family."⁸ The "anxious soldier" was in fact to become a recognizable character of the war.⁹ It was clear that these matters needed to be addressed if the morale and thus the fighting efficiency of the Army was to be maintained.

Yet it was equally clear to the War Office that a reliance on the efforts of regimental officers alone would not be sufficient to cater for the welfare needs of the wartime soldiers. Not only were they considered to be fully engaged in training the new troops and thus less

⁷ Captain X, [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), p. 156.

⁸ Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive [hereafter M.O.-A.], T.C. 29/2/E, 1 September 1940.

⁹ Maj. R. A. C. Radcliffe, "Officer-Man Relationships," *Army Quarterly* 46 (May 1943), p. 121.

able to devote time to welfare matters, but many of the personal problems they were likely to confront were regarded as outside the ken of the average junior officer.¹⁰ Moreover, although on the outbreak of war various voluntary organizations and other bodies began to organize welfare provision for the Army, the service was largely patchy, uncoordinated and some areas which were almost denuded of troops received some assistance, whilst others which were overcrowded received little.¹¹

It was in these circumstances that, at the invitation of Hore-Belisha, Lieutenant-General Sir John Brown, a territorial officer, peacetime architect and a founder and former chairman of the British Legion, was appointed War Office Adviser on Welfare, and on the basis of the scheme that had been discussed in the Summer, and with the cooperation of Territorial Army Associations, a network of voluntary, unpaid Command, County and Sub-County Social Welfare Officers was established around the country in November 1939.¹² The Sub-County Social Welfare Officers, or Local Army Welfare Officers as they subsequently became known, formed the backbone of the

¹⁰ WO 32/14569, A.P.W.P./P(45)47; WO 277/4, Memorandum on Social Welfare in the Army at Home, 1 November 1939, Appendix "1B" to Morgan, p. 178.

¹¹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 6.

¹² Ibid., pp. 6-8.

organization.¹³ Drawn mainly from the ranks of retired or ex-Army officers, but coming to encompass Town and County Councillors, Justices of the Peace and other persons of local standing and influence, a number of whom were women,¹⁴ it was made clear that they were not intended to interfere in welfare arrangements already existing in units. Their function was to get in touch with commanding officers in their locality and, in cooperation with voluntary organizations and other bodies in the vicinity, provide what help and assistance they could in terms of securing various amenities and recreational facilities for the troops, as well as giving advice on personal problems. In this respect, one suggestion was the setting up of information bureaux in military camps along the lines of those being set up to advise civilians.¹⁵ Inevitably, they also came to assume the role of liaison officers between the Army and the civil population, handling complaints and misunderstandings arising from the "military occupation" and seeking to settle disputes amicably. By 1940, some 700 of these officers were in

¹³ A Local Army Welfare Officer, "Six Years of Army Welfare," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 91 (February 1946), p. 52.

¹⁴ WO 32/14569, "The Future of the Home Voluntary Army Welfare Organization," Appendix "B" to the Report of the Sub-Committee on the Future of the Army Welfare Services, A.P.W.P./P(49)21., 28 September 1949.

¹⁵ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 7-8; WO 277/4, War Office letter to General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, All Commands at Home, 1 November 1939, Appendix "1A" to Morgan, pp. 176-177; WO 277/4, Memorandum on Social Welfare in the Army at Home, pp. 178-180.

place.¹⁶

Whilst the voluntary welfare organization was being set up around the country, it also came to be recognized that a central welfare organization needed to be established at the War Office. By the Spring of 1940 there was some concern over the morale of the Army and in particular the prevailing mood of boredom amongst the troops, inactive and isolated from normal facilities as many of them were whilst the "phoney war" continued.¹⁷ At the instigation of the Army Council, in March 1940 a committee was set up under the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Haining, to look into the question of welfare in the Army. The committee reported in May that much good work had already been done but pointed out that a certain amount of confusion and overlapping still remained. Although it was reiterated that unit officers should continue to be the chief factor in caring for the soldier's welfare, it was recommended that in view of the extended needs of the new citizen intake, and the necessity of ensuring that the assistance of voluntary agencies was mobilized effectively to serve what was a nation in arms, a new Welfare Directorate be

¹⁶ Lt.-Col. J. C. Atkinson, "The Local Army Welfare Officer," *The Journal of the Royal Norfolk Regiment* 9 (May 1957), p. 39; A Local Army Welfare Officer, pp. 52, 55.

¹⁷ WO 199/1644, Minutes of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief's Conference, Southern Command, 20 January 1940; WO 163/48, Notes of the Proceedings of a Meeting of the Army Council, A.C.M.(O.S.)5., 12 February 1940.

created in the War Office to exercise general control and supervision over welfare provision for the Army. Moreover, it was advocated that the state had a responsibility to look after the needs of those it had called upon to abandon civil life for service in the Army, and that funds should be provided by the government for welfare.¹⁸

Whilst the Haining Report was being considered events were moving apace. The evacuation of troops from Dunkirk brought with it new welfare demands and fresh concerns over the Army's morale. Furthermore, for the first time Service welfare appeared upon the parliamentary horizon in the form of a well-reported debate on the provision of amenities at railway stations, and the opinions expressed made it clear that members expected proper facilities to be made available for the troops. It was in these circumstances that in July 1940 the Army Council agreed to the formation of a Directorate of Welfare, and the Treasury was persuaded to provide funding.¹⁹

The Directorate was headed initially by Lieutenant-General Sir John Brown who was made Director-General of Welfare. By the end of 1940, however, the expected invasion following Dunkirk had not occurred and the Army

¹⁸ WO 163/412, Report of the Committee on Educational, Welfare and Recreational Needs of the Army, 7 May 1940, pp. 19, 21, 26-27, 31.

¹⁹ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 21, 23.

was facing a long winter of equipping and training which would place a heavy strain upon morale. With this in mind, the Army Council decided to reorganize and expand the Directorate and in December Major-General Harry Willans, a territorial divisional commander, former General Manager of the Association for Promoting the General Welfare of the Blind and a peacetime executive with a large catering firm, was appointed as the new Director-General of Welfare; a post that from the Summer of 1941 was placed under the direct control and administration of the Adjutant-General, General Adam.²⁰

At the end of 1940 it was also agreed that to assist them in their duties the voluntary welfare officers be granted the right to wear uniform if they so chose and given honorary commissions; the Command Welfare Officers earning the rank of colonel, the County Welfare Officers that of lieutenant-colonel, and the Local Army Welfare Officers that of captain. To accompany this, from January 1941 a direct line of communication was established between the War Office and the welfare officers through the issue of a monthly Welfare Memorandum containing directives, information and advice.²¹ In March, Major-General Willans outlined the guiding principles of Army Welfare:

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 21, 25-26, 40.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

The object of Army Welfare may be stated simply as being the maintenance of the morale of officers and men, primarily to fit them to carry out their duty as soldiers when the time comes, be it sooner or later, with the utmost possible efficiency; secondly in order that their relations with the civilian population may be such as to ensure the maximum co-operation between the Army and the nation in the national effort; and thirdly that they, the soldiers, may in due course be better citizens as a result of their service in the Army. In order to achieve this object it is necessary to cater for the whole needs of the man - the needs of his mind, his body and his spirit, or to put it differently, to aim at a high standard of physical, mental and moral well-being which together will result in a contented soldier and so in a contented Army. It is to be noted that his needs are not solely canteens or concerts, footballs or food - though these are important in their way; far more important than merely physical requirements are his mental and emotional needs.²²

With the establishment of the welfare organization, the details of which were included in such pamphlets for officers as *The Soldier's Welfare* which was produced by the Welfare Directorate and ran into four editions, so it became possible to set about providing for the welfare needs of the Army at home in a coordinated fashion. To add to this, from 1943 full-time serving Welfare Officers were also appointed to the major overseas commands to organize welfare services abroad.²³

In the first instance, a range of amenities and recreational facilities were laid on for the troops.

²² Maj.-Gen. H. Willans, "Army Welfare and Education," *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 86 (May 1941), p. 246.

²³ Lt.-Col. C. F. G. Hope, "The Future of Army Welfare," *Army Quarterly* 52 (April 1946), pp. 119-120.

Indeed, the importance of giving soldiers something to do in their spare time was emphasized by the fact that "boredom" came to be identified by morale reports as an important factor in the incidence of absence without leave.²⁴ As one Anti-Aircraft commander commented:

I consider one of the main difficulties to be overcome is boredom, particularly in the long winter months. Every endeavour is being made to stimulate the men's interests and to keep their minds active but this problem with so many small detachments... is not easy of solution.²⁵

At the forefront of much of this work were the Local Army Welfare Officers. They visited units, assessed their needs and did whatever they could to improve the living conditions of troops in their areas and provide them with means of rest and relaxation; whether that meant simply organizing hot baths in nearby houses, mobilizing local ladies to mend clothing or arranging for soldiers to spend an evening a week in a local resident's front room.²⁶ However, under the auspices of the Welfare Directorate a variety of services were built up.

To supplement the canteen provision of the NAAFI, whose resources were unable to meet the demands of the

²⁴ WO 163/51, Morale Report, February-May 1942, A.C./G.(42)20., 12 June 1942.

²⁵ WO 163/88, Morale Report, January 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942.

²⁶ Willans, pp. 249, 251; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 54; Atkinson, p. 39; War Office, *The Soldier's Welfare. Notes for Officers*, 16 July 1941, pp. 35-36.

expanding Army and whose premises soldiers often found too institutional, a network of static and mobile canteens was organized for the troops run by such bodies as the Women's Voluntary Services, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Salvation Army, the Church Army, the Catholic Women's League and TOC H, which together with the other philanthropic agencies with a religious background came together to form the Council of Voluntary War Work (C.V.W.W.). Supervised by the Local Army Welfare Officers and with the emphasis on the creation of a real home atmosphere, some 7,000 canteens of this type were established at camps, towns and main line railway stations across Britain, and several hundred more were dispatched overseas. Further to this, a network of hostels was organized in cooperation with the C.V.W.W. where troops on leave or in transit could obtain comfortable board and lodgings at 1/6 a night. Watched over by Local Army Welfare Officers, these were established in thirty-six major cities and towns around the country with a number also set up for soldiers abroad.²⁷

Various welfare gifts for the troops were also arranged

²⁷ Harry Miller, *Service to the Services. The Story of the NAAFI* (London: Newman Neame, 1971), pp. 51-52; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 11-12, 23, 76-79, 171-172; Willans, pp. 253-255; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 54; Atkinson, pp. 40-41; Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Cribb Papers, Cribb I/IV, *The Soldier's Welfare. Notes for Officers*, War Office, 21 April 1943, pp. 29, 35.

by Army Welfare. The provision of warm clothing was taken in hand and teams of voluntary knitters were organized across Britain and supplied with wool at subsidized prices to produce cap-mufflers, gloves, pullovers, scarves and gumboot stockings. Moreover, with the assistance of contributions in cash and kind from the various Service welfare funds set up by Lords Lieutenant, Lord Mayors, Lord Provosts and various newspapers around the country, as well as bodies such as the Nuffield Trust which donated £1.5m towards Service welfare provision, so it became possible to supply the troops with such articles as playing cards, dart boards, sports equipment and gramophones. All these goods were made available to units at home through Local Army Welfare Officers or dispatched to those overseas by an Army Comforts Depot at Reading, an establishment run initially by volunteers from the Berkshire Territorial Army Association but taken over by the Welfare Directorate in 1943. By the end of the war it was estimated that some 14 million items had been distributed to the Army through this depot.²⁸

Hobby schemes were also laid on for the troops. In the Spring of 1940 the Haining Committee recommended in its report that the natural world offered a stimulating

²⁸ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 3, 13-15, 62-105, 172; Willans, p. 255; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 54; Atkinson, p. 39; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, pp. 35, 40.

outlet for many troops, especially in isolated posts,²⁹ and at the beginning of 1941 a Hobby Gardening Scheme was set up by the Welfare Directorate in Home Commands. Under this scheme, tools and seeds were supplied by Local Army Welfare Officers to soldiers with an interest in horticulture, plots of ground were made available by the Director of Quartering at the War Office to those working on the scheme, and head gardeners, chairmen of allotment associations, park superintendents and others were appointed as advisers to units in their village or district. Command competitions were organized and judged by the Ministry of Agriculture, and Eastern Command went so far as to exhibit vegetables at the Royal Horticultural Society's Show and won a silver medal for its produce.³⁰ In 1943 a Bird Watching Scheme was also established in Home Commands in association with the Nature Observations Sub-Committee of the Royal Society, under which troops with an interest in bird life monitored the flight of wood pigeons and fulmer petrels across Britain. A similar scheme was set up in the Middle East to study the movements of sand grouse.³¹

²⁹ WO 163/412, Report of the Committee on Educational, Welfare and Recreational Needs of the Army, p. 28.

³⁰ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 110-112; Willans, p. 255; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, p. 35.

³¹ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Adam Papers [hereafter Adam], Adam VIII, typescript narrative by Gen. Sir Ronald Adam on "Various Administrative Aspects of the Army during the Second World War," 1963, chap. 6, p. 13; Prince Consort's Army Library, "The History of Army Education (1939-1945)," War Office Monograph by W. E. Williams, 1949, p. 88.

Live entertainment also came to be arranged by Army Welfare. Whilst Local Army Welfare Officers were on hand to arrange for local amateur voluntary groups to put on theatrical shows for troops in their areas, or sought where possible to negotiate discounts for soldiers at local theatres,³² in the early months of the war the Army relied mainly on the NAAFI organization for its live entertainment. Under the NAAFI, this was provided by the Entertainments National Service Association (E.N.S.A.). Founded and directed by the impresario Basil Dean from the Drury Lane Theatre, E.N.S.A. was composed of volunteers from all branches of the professional entertainment world who were paid £10 a week for their services.³³ Yet dissatisfaction with E.N.S.A. soon grew within the Army. In May 1940 the Haining Committee, which had considered the provision of entertainment, reported that although E.N.S.A. was performing a valuable service, evidence had not only come to light that the growing demand for entertainment was not being met, but that the standard of entertainment provided was not all that it should have been. Whilst it was acknowledged that assistance from external professional sources would continue to be needed, it was suggested that the Army

³² WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 24, 50, 84, 87, 96, 103, 172; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, p. 37.

³³ Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1956), pp. 21-22, 38-40; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 24, 43-44.

should seek to develop its own sources of entertainment.³⁴

Matters came to a head after the evacuation of the troops from Dunkirk. Not only were there more troops in Britain than ever before needing to be entertained, but criticism of E.N.S.A. reached a new peak. Whilst soldiers in more accessible regions complained that the entertainment was often low brow, those in remote areas complained that despite extravagant publicity they had never received any entertainment from E.N.S.A.³⁵ What determined policy, though, was the spiralling costs of entertainment to the NAAFI. The evacuation of the Army from Norway and France had created a £1.4m deficit for the NAAFI. In the meantime, the costs of E.N.S.A. had risen to £1m a year and in agreeing to underwrite NAAFI's debts the Treasury was pressing for reductions in expenditure. It was in these circumstances, and with the view being held in some circles in the War Office that the Army could provide a better service than E.N.S.A. at less cost, that in July 1940 the Army Council decided to cut professional entertainment by 50%.³⁶

The decision came as a bitter blow to E.N.S.A., who were

³⁴ WO 163/412, Report of the Committee on Educational, Welfare and Recreational Needs of the Army, pp. 23-24.

³⁵ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 44; Thomas Stevens, "This People's Army," *Fabian Quarterly*, no. 28 (Winter 1940), p. 3.

³⁶ Miller, p. 52; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 24, 44-45.

forced to dispense with the services of a number of employees, and created an atmosphere of suspicion and resentment between Drury Lane and the War Office which continued throughout the war.³⁷ However, it provided the stimulus for the Army to organize its own live entertainment. To this end, in the Summer of 1940 the Welfare Directorate appointed Entertainment Officers to Home Commands. These were drawn from serving officers with professional experience in the field whose function was to assist units in forming their own concert parties, and to aid them in this task special grants were made available for musical instruments, stage scenery and theatrical properties.³⁸ George Black, producer of wartime shows at the London Palladium, the Hippodrome and the Prince of Wales Theatre, was also appointed as honorary entertainment adviser to the Army.³⁹

At the beginning of 1941 it was further proposed by the Welfare Directorate that a number of War Office concert parties be formed from amongst serving performers in the Army. These parties, it was suggested, would form a central pool that would be available for service in any part of a command where entertainment was difficult to obtain, and would serve as samples of the standard and

³⁷ Dean, pp. 142-157; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 45, 48-49.

³⁸ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 24-25, 50; Willans, p. 252; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, pp. 36-37.

³⁹ "Notes of the Week," *The Economist* 139 (September 1940), p. 334.

type of entertainment that it was thought would be most enjoyable to a military audience.⁴⁰ There was another advantage. Unit performances might be cancelled at a moment's notice on the whims of officers who took a dislike to an artist or production. The new organization would supplement the efforts of unit parties and fill gaps caused by cancellation.⁴¹ Although the plan put a strain on manpower because it entailed withdrawing men with expertise from units,⁴² and met with some opposition within the War Office from those who disapproved of soldiers performing such unmilitary duties as tap-dancing or saxophone-playing,⁴³ with the backing of General Adam the Central Pool of Artistes was set up under the Welfare Directorate in October 1941 for a six-month trial period.⁴⁴

Under the direction of Colonel Basil Brown, a businessman who before the war had been involved with the York Repertory Theatre, and based at Nissen Hut 13, Royal Ordinance Depot, Greenford, the Central Pool of Artistes, or "Stars in Battledress" as they became better known,

⁴⁰ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 50.

⁴¹ Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh. Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces 1939-1946* (London: MacDonald & Jane's, 1978), p. 40.

⁴² WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 50.

⁴³ Eric Maschwitz, *No Chip on my Shoulder* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1957), p. 149.

⁴⁴ Fawkes, p. 40; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 50.

consisted initially of some fifty artistes all of whom were professional entertainers before their call up. The first performances were given in December 1941 and six months later a special command performance was arranged for the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg. This met with his approval and in May 1942 a new base was found at the Duke of York's Barracks in Chelsea and additional performers were recruited.⁴⁵ By 1945 the Pool was some 200 strong and included amongst its number such performers as Charlie Chester, Terry-Thomas, Harry Secombe, Spike Milligan and Norman Vaughan. Janet Brown, the singer and impressionist, joined from the A.T.S. and became the first female member.⁴⁶

Variety was regarded as the most popular form of entertainment but "Stars in Battledress" made efforts to cater for a range of tastes. Serious music, in the form of a sextet led by the violinist Eugene Pini, was sent on tour and, it was concluded, succeeded in persuading a number of soldiers that chamber music was as good as the latest jazz tune.⁴⁷ Drama also came to be featured. The first moves to set up a specific play unit in the Army came in fact from outside the Central Pool of Artistes. At the end of 1941 the actor Charles Cameron formed the

⁴⁵ Fawkes, pp. 40-43.

⁴⁶ Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 11; Fawkes, pp. 41, 43, 45-47; John Graven Hughes, *The Greasepaint War. Show Business 1939-45* (London: New English Library, 1976), pp. 182-184.

⁴⁷ Fawkes, p. 44.

London District Theatre Unit to tour productions around the areas where E.N.S.A. did not visit, and he obtained the release of some twenty men and women with various levels of expertise in the theatre to perform under the direction of Sergeant Stephen Murray. By 1943 the work of the London District Theatre Unit, along with that of E.N.S.A. play companies, repertory theatres and one-off Army productions, persuaded Army Welfare to set up a special "Stars in Battledress" play section. The first play performed was Terrence Rattigan's West End success *Flare Path*. Directed by Murray Macdonald, who had run a season of plays at the Garrison Theatre at Salisbury, it starred Wilfred Hyde White, Kenneth Connor and Faith Brook. This was followed by another West End play, *Men In Shadow* by Mary Hayley Bell, which featured William Kendall, George Cooper and Geoffrey Keen. Both plays were set during the war and utilized contemporary experience to strengthen the resolve of the audience.⁴⁸ It was estimated that for many soldiers this came to represent their first taste of serious drama.⁴⁹

Overall, by the Autumn of 1942 the Army itself was providing the largest share of live entertainment for troops in Britain, with Service parties giving some 7,000

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 47-49.

⁴⁹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 51.

performances a month.⁵⁰ Moreover, in 1943 "Stars in Battledress" made their first overseas tour to the Middle East and this was followed by further tours, with a party being landed in Normandy as early as D.Day plus eight.⁵¹

It is perhaps also worthy of note that although the quality of E.N.S.A. shows was never free from criticism (one soldier relating that "the R.A.F. should have dropped them over Germany, it would have shortened the war by 12 months.")⁵² there was evidence to suggest that they were not always so badly received. Early in 1941 the War Office sent out a questionnaire to ascertain the opinion of troops on E.N.S.A. performances of all kinds, and some 70% of the replies were either enthusiastic or appreciative.⁵³

Whilst the matter of live entertainment was being considered, Army Welfare also turned its attention to the provision of cinematic entertainment. Again, whilst Local Army Welfare Officers were on hand to arrange for local voluntary groups to give film shows to troops in their areas, or where possible negotiate discount seats for soldiers at local cinemas, the Army relied initially on E.N.S.A. to provide cinematic entertainment for the

⁵⁰ WO 163/51, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(42)34., September 1942.

⁵¹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 51.

⁵² James Rochford, letter to the author, May 1988.

⁵³ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 49.

troops.⁵⁴ In May 1940, though, the Haining Committee had suggested that the Army should consider providing its own cinemas,⁵⁵ and following the decision to cut professional entertainment in July, steps were taken in this direction. Early in 1940 the Directorate of Military Training at the War Office had set up a mobile cinema organization for the showing of its training films. In August it was agreed that they should also be used to show entertainment films. To this end, a small section was set up in the Welfare Directorate, under the expert guidance of Major Alfred Davis, to select and supply films, Cinema Officers with knowledge of the field were appointed to Home Commands to organize film shows, and orders were placed for an extra 300 mobile and portable cinemas. During 1940-41 some £100,000 was spent on providing films for the troops.⁵⁶

With the demand for both training and entertainment films increasing, in August 1941 the decision was taken to rationalize the use of cinema in the Army and a new Directorate of Army Kinematography (D.A.K.) was

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 24, 81, 83, 96; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, p. 37.

⁵⁵ WO 163/412, Report of the Committee on Educational, Welfare and Recreational Needs of the Army, p. 24.

⁵⁶ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 25, 51-53; Willans, p. 252; WO 32/9431, V.C.I.G.S. to D.U.S., 29 August 1940; WO 32/9431, D.U.S. to V.C.I.G.S., n.d. [but September 1940]; WO 32/9431, Extract from the Minutes of the 305th Meeting of the Treasury Inter-Service Committee, 19th September 1940; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, p. 36.

established at the War Office under the direction of Paul Kimberley, the Managing Director of National Screen Service and a governor of The British Film Institute. This assumed overall responsibility for the provision of films and special Kinematographic Sections of skilled technicians were formed throughout the Army to maintain film libraries and show the films.⁵⁷ In July 1942 the Welfare Directorate section that handled film matters was absorbed into this organization, but close cooperation was maintained between the two directorates.⁵⁸ By 1944 annual expenditure on recreational films had reached some £360,000 and during that year royalties were paid for the right to exhibit 107 full-length British and American films, 60 shorts, 48 Disney cartoons and 104 newsreels to troops at home and overseas.⁵⁹

Further to this, it is worth recording that D.A.K.'s film production unit, which came to include amongst its number such figures from the film world as Carol Reed, Thorold Dickinson, Freddie Young, Peter Ustinov and Eric Ambler, and which earned complaints from Wardour Street about the

⁵⁷ WO 32/9772, "Memorandum on the Use of Cinematograph Films in the Army," author unknown, 9 April 1941; WO 32/9772, Proposed Appointment of a Director or Controller of Cinematography at the War Office, Minutes of a Meeting, 16 June 1941; "Films for Army Use," *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 1374 (August 1941), p. 410; WO 163/50, War Office Progress Report, A.C./P(41)63., October 1941; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁸ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 52; WO 163/54, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(45)3., January 1945.

Army's creaming off of civilian talent, took on responsibility for the Army's production of its own training films in 1941, and produced a range of new films at the former Fox studios at Wembley which were, it was considered, one of the most effective means of imparting information to the "cinema minded" citizen soldier.⁶⁰ Indeed, the recognition of the value of this medium for military instruction was illustrated by the fact that whilst in 1930 some 80 silent films were available for this purpose, by the Spring of 1944 over 200 up-to-date films were in circulation on all aspects of collective and individual training, with over 500 copies of one particular film distributed.⁶¹ As part of this effort, D.A.K. produced a special film for recruits in 1942 entitled *The New Lot*. Made at the suggestion of and in collaboration with Army psychiatrists, the film was specifically designed to raise morale by suggesting to the troops ways of overcoming the emotional problems of separation from home and the compensatory rewards of military life.⁶²

⁶⁰ Imperial War Museum, Lewis Papers, extracts from unpublished work by B. Lewis on "The British Film Industry 1939-1945," pp. 14-15; Jeffrey Richards, *Thorold Dickinson. The Man and His Films* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 105; WO 32/9772, "Memorandum on the Use of Cinematograph Films in the Army.," WO 163/51, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(42)2., December 1941.

⁶¹ Capt. J. A. D. Cartwright, "The Film in Military Training," *Army Quarterly* 48 (April 1944), pp. 47-48.

⁶² Privy Council Office, *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services* (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 57; John Rawlings Rees, *The Shaping of Psychiatry by War* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945), p. 88.

Army Welfare further became involved in broadcasting, a matter to which the Army had given little thought since the introduction of the wireless into general use after 1918. Whilst Local Army Welfare Officers did what they could to procure wireless sets from local organizations or private individuals for troops in their areas, efforts were made centrally to secure sets under Lend-Lease arrangements for distribution either through welfare officers to units at home or dispatch abroad. By 1943 the Army was planning on the scale of one set to every seventy soldiers.⁶³ However, the welfare authorities also became concerned with programming matters. From early in 1940 wireless programmes for the Services were provided by the BBC through its daily Forces Programme. This came to include a number of features dealing with Army matters, such as *John Hilton Talking*, *Radio Reconnaissance* and *Into Battle*, but was essentially a light entertainment programme interspersed by news bulletins.⁶⁴ Although an Army Liaison Officer was appointed to Broadcasting House in 1940,⁶⁵ as the war developed

⁶³ Atkinson, p. 41; Willans, p. 252; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, pp. 35, 37; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, pp. 29, 33-34; WO 163/161, Minutes of the 13th Meeting of the Morale Committee, M.C./M(43)3., 26 March 1943; WO 163/52, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(43)13., April 1943;

⁶⁴ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 54.

⁶⁵ Asa Briggs, *The War of Words*, vol. 3, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 41.

criticism of the BBC began to be voiced within the Army. In a note to the Secretary of State in March 1942 General Willans complained that the Forces Programme was not being utilized as such, was merely an alternative programme of inferior quality and that the name was retained only for its goodwill. Standards, he argued, needed to be raised and the Forces given a say in the direction of a real Forces programme.⁶⁶

Accordingly, after a survey had been undertaken of Soviet and German Forces broadcasts, of which the latter strongly suggested that broadcasts had been provided by the Forces for the Forces, with the backing of General Adam a new broadcasting section was set up in the Welfare Directorate in July 1942. Under the direction of Major Eric Maschwitz, a former Director of Variety at the BBC and editor of *The Radio Times*, its function was to liaise with the BBC and seek to improve the Forces Programme and make better use of it for the Army.⁶⁷ In August an Army Broadcasting Committee was also formed, under the chairmanship of General Willans, which was composed of representatives from all interested War Office directorates and was designed to advise and assist the section in the formulation of broadcasting

⁶⁶ WO 259/62, D.G.W & E. to P.S./S. of S., 18 March 1942.

⁶⁷ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 54-56; Briggs, pp. 41-42.

policy.⁶⁸

Indeed, on the basis of a survey undertaken by the broadcasting section amongst 1,000 troops from 100 units in Home Commands, the results of which emphasized the importance of broadcasting as a medium for influencing the troops, a policy directive was drawn up in November as to the way in which efforts should be made to influence the BBC.⁶⁹ Not only did this recommend that the general quality and presentation of entertainment and news programmes for the troops needed to be improved, but that broadcasting be better directed towards building pride and team spirit in the Army, improving the Army's image with the general public and educating it in such matters as the causes of the war, war aims and post-war conditions.⁷⁰ On the recommendation of General Adam, this was agreed by the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) in December and confirmed by the full Army Council and the Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg,

⁶⁸ WO 163/89, "Army Broadcasting Committee," Memorandum by D.A.G.(B.), E.C.A.C./P(42)114., 18 August 1942; WO 163/89, Minutes of the 73rd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)34., 21 August 1942; WO 163/89, Minutes of the 74th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)35., 28 August 1942.

⁶⁹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 55; WO 163/89, "Army Broadcasting: Development and Policy," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)153., 30 November 1942.

⁷⁰ WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./P(42)153.

subject to careful supervision of broadcast scripts.⁷¹ The BBC were persuaded to agree to the directive and in January 1943 a weekly joint War Office-BBC committee was established.⁷² Through this efforts were made by the broadcasting section to shape the Forces Programme in accordance with the needs of the Army, and in consultation with the BBC new regular features for the troops, such as *Army Voice* and *Army Hour*, were planned to War Office specification.⁷³

Whilst the broadcasting section liaised with the BBC over the Forces Programme, so it was also given the task of developing the Army's own overseas broadcasting network; a facility that became increasingly important as the Army took on a more active and extended role abroad, and the Germans sought to jam the Forces Programme and fill the air waves with their own propaganda.⁷⁴ To this end, an Overseas Recorded Broadcasting Service was set up at the Fortune Theatre in Drury Lane under the direction of Captain Frederick LLOYD, the pre-war manager of the Scala

⁷¹ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 88th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)49., 4 December 1942; WO 163/51, Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(42)8., 11 December 1942; WO 163/52, Minutes of the 20th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(43)1., 1 January 1943.

⁷² WO 163/89, E.C.A.C./M(42)49; Briggs, p. 42

⁷³ Adam IV, Notes for S. of S.'s Estimates Speech, February 1943.

⁷⁴ Gale Pedrick, [Lt.-Col. Gale Pedrick Harvey], *Battledress Broadcasters. A History of British Forces Broadcasting Service* (London: British Forces Broadcasting Service, 1964), pp. 2-3; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 57.

Theatre in London, to record a range of programmes on acetate discs for dispatch abroad,⁷⁵ and by the end of 1942 some 125 hours of air time per month had been acquired from twenty-two overseas broadcasting stations. This was followed in 1943 by the development of the Army's own overseas stations in the major theatres producing programmes on the spot for the troops.⁷⁶

Army broadcasting affairs in the Middle East were placed under the direction of Colonel Richard Meyer, who before the war had been involved in the establishment of Radio Normandie and Radio Luxembourg; in the Central Mediterranean they were controlled by Colonel Gale Pedrick Harvey, a radio journalist and playwright; Major Bryan Cave-Brown-Cave, who had been a peacetime BBC drama producer, directed matters in the Far East and Major Jack Dibb, a journalist from the *Yorkshire Post*, directed those in the Near East.⁷⁷ Under Major John McMillan, a pre-war executive with the International Broadcasting Company, a Field Broadcasting Unit consisting of four mobile radio transmitters with studios was also dispatched to accompany 21st Army Group into Europe.⁷⁸

A popular aspect of Army broadcasting overseas was

⁷⁵ Maschwitz, p. 148.

⁷⁶ Pedrick, pp. 2-4; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 56-57.

⁷⁷ Hughes, pp. 151-152.

⁷⁸ Maschwitz, p. 162; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 58.

message programmes, such as *Cairo Calling* from the Middle East and *Calling Blighty* from the Far East, in which soldiers recorded messages for broadcast to their families in Britain. Moreover, when John McMillan discovered on arrival in Hamburg that a direct telephone line had been laid on to an exchange at Goodge Street Station in London, so was born the *Two-Way Family Favourites* programme which continued to link soldiers in Germany with their families at home for a generation after the war.⁷⁹

Of note also was the inclusion of Army psychiatrists as advisers on broadcasting matters. Not only were they represented on the Army Broadcasting Committee and subsequently on the War Office-BBC committee, but they were particularly influential in modifying the Forces Programme to counteract the hold which the German broadcasters seemed to be developing over British troops in the Middle East towards the end of 1942, through the popularity of the song *Lili Marlene*. In fact, General Adam personally arranged with Norman Collins at the BBC for Lieutenant-Colonel T. F. Main, an Army psychiatrist who had toured the troops in the area, to discuss his findings with the staff responsible for the Forces Programme on his return, and on the basis of his report the programme was amended in order to produce a

⁷⁹ Doreen Taylor, *A Microphone and a Frequency. 40 Years of Forces Broadcasting* (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 8, 24, 43-44, 51.

"corrective and tonic" effect on the troops' morale.⁸⁰

Among the most notable areas of responsibility assumed by Army Welfare was the provision of Army newspapers. In the more populated regions of Britain civilian newspapers could be obtained by Local Army Welfare officers for troops in their areas or bought by the soldiers themselves. But in the outlying parts of the country, and more especially overseas, commercial distribution problems meant that civilian newspapers were often unobtainable and there was real newspaper starvation. As a consequence, formations and units both at home and abroad began to produce their own newspapers. However, without any central control and coordination not only did their finances become chaotic and their use of precious supplies of paper prove wasteful, but their content was considered in some instances to be harmful to the war effort. Indeed, the Welfare Directorate was compelled to take action with regard to one such publication, *The Orkney Blast*, produced under the auspices of the Orkney and Shetland Command, which had featured a series of cartoons which were regarded as being detrimental to recruitment for the A.T.S. It was for these reasons, and with requests from overseas commands for assistance in

⁸⁰ *Report of an Expert Committee on the Work of Psychologists and Psychiatrists in the Services*, p. 57; Adam VIII, chap. 6, pp. 6-7; Robert H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 221-222.

providing publications, that in August 1943 a new section was set up in the Welfare Directorate, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. T. Chisholm, the former editor of *The Financial Times*, with responsibility for the direction and control of Army newspapers at home and abroad.⁸¹

This was a timely development. At the end of September 1943 the *Evening Standard* published an editorial which had recently appeared in *Eighth Army News*, a newspaper for the troops in Italy, which had been founded by Warwick Charlton, a serving officer and radical former *Daily Sketch* journalist, who was determined to produce a truly soldier's publication rather than merely a propaganda journal for the authorities. The editorial on Anglo-Italian policy, which argued that the Eighth Army soldiers could not regard the recent supporters of Mussolini as true allies, prompted a memorandum from Churchill to Sir James Grigg in October demanding to know why a paper of this kind was commenting on political matters clearly outside its province and liable to cause great harm. Grigg responded that the newspaper in question was under the control of General Montgomery, who in fact supported it as a valuable element in sustaining morale, but was able to inform the Prime Minister that arrangements were being made within the War Office for

⁸¹ S. P. MacKenzie, "Vox Populi: British Army Newspapers in the Second World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (October 1989), pp. 665-666; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 127-128.

the supervision of Army newspapers.^{8 2}

With the establishment of the new section in the Welfare Directorate financial policy was laid down, the supply of newsprint was controlled and news and other editorial material was supplied to the papers totalling many thousands of words weekly. This included a round-up of Service news, political news, general news and sports news, as well as special stories, features and photographs. Similar material was sent to Army Broadcasting Units overseas to assist them in their news bulletins and feature services.^{8 3}

Moreover, an editorial directive was drawn up which, in the opinion of General Adam, required the most careful consideration.^{8 4} Whilst it was recognized that the newspapers provided an excellent safety-valve for the troops and that opportunities should be offered in correspondence columns for the publication of critical views, editors were reminded that papers should present both sides of an argument, should seek to improve knowledge rather than inform opinion, and that they

^{8 2} MacKenzie, pp. 666-669; WO 259/77, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, Serial No. M.627/3., 4 October 1943; WO 259/77, P.J.G. to P.M., 12 October 1943.

^{8 3} WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 129-130.

^{8 4} Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 9.

should not oppose military or government policy.⁸⁵ "Many thought that too much liberty was given in the correspondence columns," Adam later recalled, "but I believe it was better to err on the generous side."⁸⁶

Under the Welfare Directorate some twenty-four newspapers came to be administered, serving soldiers all around the world. In 1945 the Press Lord, Viscount Camrose, told Chisholm that his branch's activities represented the largest group of newspapers in existence at that time, whether measured by geographical spread, volume of circulation or size of staff.⁸⁷ Whilst the editorial staff of the newspapers were drawn from serving journalists from all wings of the press, they came to include a number of well-known radicals. Besides Warwick Charlton's *Eighth Army News, S.E.A.C.*, a newspaper produced for troops in the Far East, was run by Frank Owen, the former editor of the *Evening Standard* which had been a regular government critic. *Union Jack*, a paper for soldiers in the Central Mediterranean, was overseen by Hugh Cudlipp, ex-editor of the *Sunday Pictorial* and another dissenting voice. Indeed, the staff of *Union Jack* came to include none other than William Connor, the columnist "Cassandra," who had become notorious for his

⁸⁵ WO 277/4, "Instructions to Editors of Army Newspapers," n.d. [but 1944], Appendix 15 to Morgan, pp. 267-268.

⁸⁶ Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., chap. 12, p. 7.

vitriolic attacks on the military and political establishment in the *Daily Mirror*, the most widely read civilian newspaper amongst the troops, but heartily despised by the authorities for its left-wing tendencies. Although it was rumoured that Connor had been called up to put an end to his writings, it was significant that his appointment was on the specific instruction of General Adam. Adam was prepared to take a risk with talented journalists like Connor in the hope that they would keep Army newspapers popular and in so doing help to sustain morale.⁸⁸

With such men on their staffs it was perhaps inevitable that Army papers, particularly those overseas, remained controversial. Following further complaints from Churchill, as well as some senior commanders in the field, about the dissident tone of *Eighth Army News* and *Union Jack*, General Lord Burnham, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, was sent to the Mediterranean Theatre in April 1944 to investigate the matter.⁸⁹ Although he reported that the papers were very much of the *Daily Mirror* school in which "a generally unpleasant and cynical slant is given to the actions of authority, and there is a sort of general suggestion of conspiracy in high places against the common man," he nevertheless concluded:

⁸⁸ MacKenzie, pp. 667-668, 671; Adam VIII, chap. 6, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁹ MacKenzie, pp. 672-674.

I do not like to let this report go without stating my opinion that, by and large, a very good job has been done. As newspapers, these papers are very much more readable and informative than those produced by our Allies with larger staffs, more assistance and support from home, and greater opportunities.

Very much of the credit for this is due to Cudlipp, and a lot of praise should be given to Charlton of 'Eighth Army News' to set against his unpardonable indiscretions. Staffs have been enthusiastic and have worked extremely hard and in the face of every sort of difficulty. It is not surprising to find that some of them suffer from the defaults de leur qualites.

They suffered perhaps from a lack of guidance and understanding of the function of Army newspapers.

This is now being corrected, and all should be well.⁹⁰

Both Adam and Grigg accepted Burnham's views, Grigg noting that he was "quite content to leave things where they are for the present."⁹¹ Although Churchill remained dissatisfied, suspecting a whitewash, he restricted himself to suggesting that more responsible journalists be placed on the staffs of the papers.⁹²

As the war drew to a close and attention began to shift towards a possible general election, Army newspapers continued to be a source of contention and were accused by the Conservative Party of adopting a partisan approach

⁹⁰ WO 259/79, "Army Newspapers," Memorandum by D.P.R., 6 May 1944.

⁹¹ WO 259/79, A.G. to S. of S., 6 May 1944; WO 259/79, Note by P.J.G., 12 May 1944.

⁹² MacKenzie, pp. 676-677.

to domestic political issues.⁹³ In fact, Ralph Assheton, the chairman of the party, personally approached Grigg, his fellow Conservative, over what he considered to be the amount of left-wing propaganda that was appearing in Service newspapers. Despite Grigg's assurances over impartiality, Assheton wrote to him in January 1945 complaining that "it has once more been brought to my notice that there is still a distinct political bias towards the Left in all the newspapers which are produced for Forces overseas."⁹⁴

It was notable, however, that conscious of their value in sustaining morale the War Office remained remarkably supportive of its newspapers. With the help of Chisholm's branch, a reply was drafted by Grigg which not only refuted Assheton's assertions, and recorded that what criticisms had reached the War Office came as much from the Left as the Right, but argued that even if it was possible to find a leaning to the Left in one or two papers this was by no means marked nor called for serious criticism.⁹⁵ Indeed, Grigg further countered:

That Army papers should, if left to themselves, lean to the Left seems to me to be only a reflection of what is happening in the newspaper

⁹³ MacKenzie, pp. 677-678.

⁹⁴ WO 259/69, letter from Ralph Assheton to Sir James Grigg, 24 January 1945.

⁹⁵ MacKenzie, p. 678; WO 259/69, D.A.W.S. to A.C.S., 27 January 1945; WO 259/69, draft letter from Sir James Grigg to Ralph Assheton, 31 January 1945.

world generally, and I don't see how you can blame us if in the outside world you cannot attract the rising generation of journalists away from the Left or prevent newspapers which one would have expected to be neutral in their colour adopting a pink coat.⁹⁶

Reflecting on the editorial staffs and the accusations of political bias after the war, General Adam came to the conclusion that they did a difficult job very well. "Personally," he recalled, "I think they kept a very fair balance."⁹⁷

A further sphere of responsibility assumed by Army Welfare was the supply of books and other recreational reading matter to the Army. Whilst Local Army Welfare Officers sought to obtain books from local organizations for troops in their areas,⁹⁸ in the more remote parts of Britain, and in particular overseas, books again were in short supply. To assist in this matter, and with the support of the War Office, in November 1939 the Lord Mayor of London launched a national appeal for gifts of money or books, under the title of "The Service Libraries and Books Fund," and a Central Book Depot was set up by the City of London Territorial Army and Air Force Association at Finsbury, from which reading material was distributed through welfare officers to troops at home or

⁹⁶ WO 259/69, draft letter from Sir James Grigg to Ralph Assheton, 31 January 1945.

⁹⁷ Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 8

⁹⁸ A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 54; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 82, 86-88, 97.

dispatched abroad.⁹⁹ In association with the Depot the welfare authorities were able to offer special concessionary schemes to the troops. Selections of one hundred Penguin and other similar paper-backed books were made available to units at home and abroad, if they so chose, for 35 shillings with carriage paid. A Forces Book Club was also introduced by which units subscribing £3 a year could obtain ten books a month, post free wherever they were stationed.¹⁰⁰

However, by 1943 the Central Book Depot's task had become so great, with not only a million books but half a million periodicals and magazines sorted and distributed each month to all three Services, that the Welfare Directorate was obliged to take over its administration and Colonel Chisholm's section was given this task. The opportunity was further taken by the Welfare Directorate at this time to coordinate properly the supply of civilian newspapers to overseas commands, and with a special allocation of newsprint from the Paper Controller, by the end of the war a quarter of a million papers were being flown daily to the Forces in North West Europe alone.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Col. A. C. T. White, *The Story of Army Education 1643-1963* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1963), p. 160; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 16-17; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1941, pp. 36-37.

¹⁰⁰ *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, p. 34.

¹⁰¹ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 17, 128; Adam VIII, chap. 12, pp. 3, 6.

Interestingly, the provision of books, magazines and civilian newspapers also became a matter of some controversy. In his letter to Grigg in January 1945 over left-wing Army newspapers, Assheton not only enquired why it was that the *Daily Mirror*, and the leftish magazine *Picture Post*, seemed to be the most widely distributed civilian publications amongst the troops overseas, but further complained: "It has also been brought to my attention that there is considerable Left Wing bias in the books available in Service libraries."¹⁰²

In his reply to Assheton, Grigg remained equally unmoved by these assertions. Not only was it pointed out that the distribution of civilian newspapers was fixed in proportion to their audited circulation at home, and the *Daily Mirror* had one of the largest circulations, but the selection of magazines was made by an inter-departmental committee under a civil servant, Sir Herbert Creedy, and whilst the number of copies of *Picture Post* was in any case to be reduced to make way make for other magazines, the choices sought to cater for as wide a taste as possible and were not influenced by party politics. It was recorded, moreover, that whilst the Creedy Committee made every effort to ensure that a fair balance of opinion was maintained in the selections of books sent to the troops, supplies were largely dependent upon

¹⁰² WO 259/69, letter from Ralph Assheton to Sir James Grigg, 24 January 1945.

donations from the public, and Grigg concluded:

I am not in a position to say whether gifts from the public contain an undue preponderance of leftist books, or whether, if they do, it is because the public is anxious to get rid of such books or anxious that the troops should have the benefit of them.¹⁰³

Whilst Army Welfare made efforts, then, to provide a range of amenities and recreational facilities for the troops, so its remit also came to extend to such matters as arranging transportation for soldiers at home on leave from overseas, and various schemes were administered through Local Army Welfare Officers. In April 1940 a Get-You-Home Scheme was organized across the country with the backing of the Ministry of Transport, under which volunteer drivers from such bodies as the British Legion and the Rotary Club were provided with extra petrol coupons to drive soldiers home from railway stations after the hours when public transport was available. In the Summer of 1940 a Leave Petrol Scheme was also initiated by which certain categories of soldiers could apply for supplementary petrol coupons and special temporary car and motor cycle permits during their stay. Moreover, at the end of 1944 a Families Liaison Scheme was established which enabled officers stationed in the distant theatres of war to be granted extensions of leave, free travel warrants and petrol coupons of up to

¹⁰³ WO 259/69, draft letter from Sir James Grigg to Ralph Assheton, 31 January 1945.

300 miles to visit the families of officers and men of their units so as to give them news of their relatives serving abroad.¹⁰⁴

A further area of Army Welfare's work, and one that became increasingly pressing as the war dragged on and soldiers faced periods of extended separation from their families, was an attempt to alleviate some of the personal problems of the troops. Indeed, the importance of helping soldiers in these matters was emphasized by the fact that "home worries" came to be identified by Army morale reports as another important factor in absence without leave.¹⁰⁵ As one summary concluded:

Practically every report, whatever its source, provides illustrations of how the soldier's home life affects his keenness, efficiency and morale.¹⁰⁶

Again, at the forefront of much of this work were the Local Army Welfare Officers who interviewed concerned soldiers, gave advice where they could, or referred them to the various statutory or non-statutory agencies in

¹⁰⁴ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 38-39, 73, 101; WO 277/4, "Leave Petrol Scheme," Appendix 9 to Morgan, p. 251; WO 277/4, "Get-You-Home Scheme," Appendix 10 to Morgan, p. 252; WO 277/4, "Families Liaison Scheme," Appendix 11 to Morgan, p. 253; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 54.

¹⁰⁵ WO 163/88, Morale Report, January 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942.

¹⁰⁶ WO 163/52, Morale Report, February-April 1943, A.C./G(43)17., 3 July 1943.

their areas that could best help them.¹⁰⁷ However, the Welfare Directorate made special efforts to relieve certain problems.

One particular problem was the anxiety of soldiers over the fate of their families under air raids; an anxiety compounded by the knowledge that troops in outlying military camps lived in comparative safety compared with those in towns and cities.¹⁰⁸ By the late Summer of 1940 air raids on Britain had become almost a daily occurrence, and soldiers were naturally anxious to know if their relatives had been injured in the raids. The situation, though, was complicated by security regulations which made it impossible to ascertain from newspapers even the names of the localities that had been raided, and this led to many rumours and unnecessary fears. At this time London was the area most affected by the bombing and the London District Welfare Officer evolved an Air Raid Enquiry Scheme under which soldiers could make enquiries at his office about the well-being of relatives, and would, after a short interval, receive a reliable report on the matter.¹⁰⁹

This scheme was limited initially to the Metropolitan

¹⁰⁷ Willans, p. 249; A Local Army Welfare Officer, pp. 52-53; Atkinson, pp. 38, 40; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁸ M.O.-A., TC 29/2/A, 23 September 1940; Roland Wild, *The Rest of the Day's Your Own* (London: Robert Hale, 1943), p. 219.

¹⁰⁹ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 25, 34.

Area. However, with air raids spreading to almost every region the Welfare Directorate decided to institute a similar scheme to cover the entire country and, after consultations with the Home Office and the Ministry of Health, an extended Air Raid Enquiry Scheme was brought into operation early in 1941. Under this scheme, Army personnel stationed in Britain were instructed to address all communications regarding air raid enquiries to the Town Clerk, or Clerk of the Urban or Rural District Council nearest their home, and those abroad to the Overseas Department of the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Forces Association (S.S.A.F.A.). To avoid confusion and delays, each soldier was also advised to ensure that his relatives carried a card containing his name and Army particulars, and requesting that he be notified if the holder was killed or seriously injured in a raid. In each locality a searcher service was organized by Local Army Welfare Officers from amongst members of S.S.A.F.A., the Soldiers' Sailors' and Airmen's Help Society (The Help Society), the Women's Voluntary Service or any other local organizations with members willing to help. Their duty was to see that after a raid all enquiries about injuries to relatives or damaged property were thoroughly investigated and promptly replied to. Military Assistance Officers were also appointed to Home Commands to help soldiers whose homes had been hit over matters such as extensions of leave or advances of pay. Moreover, whenever a town had received a particularly

heavy raid, a Forces Enquiry Office was set up in the vicinity. Normally staffed by S.S.A.F.A., its function was to advise Service personnel and their families over civil matters such as claims, evacuation and funeral arrangements.¹¹⁰

Another problem was that of matrimonial disputes between soldiers and their wives; often the result, it was alleged, of infidelity on the part of wives unable to stand the strain of prolonged separation.¹¹¹ Various suggestions were made as to how the question of infidelity should be approached, including making special broadcasts on the BBC's *Mostly for Women* programme and enclosing a leaflet on the subject with issues of family allowance books, both of which were deemed inappropriate for a matter of such delicacy.¹¹² However, in April 1942 the Welfare Directorate took the practical step of introducing a Reconciliation Scheme with the aim of resolving differences between husband and wife before a wife's family allowance was stopped and a home broken up without good cause. Under this scheme, soldiers whose normal domestic relations had ceased, or

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 34-35; Willans, pp. 249-250; Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 4; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, p. 29; "Soldiers' Air Raid Problems," Appendix "C" to *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, pp. 48-56; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 52.

¹¹¹ WO 163/161, Draft Morale Report, May-July 1942, M.C./P(42)1., 11 September 1942; WO 163/161, Morale Report, August-October 1942, M.C./P(42)3., 15 December 1942.

¹¹² WO 163/161, Minutes of the 12th Meeting of the Morale Committee, M.C./M(43)2., 19 February 1943.

who had strong reasons to believe they had ceased, were instructed to report the matter to their commanding officer. Those who were temporarily estranged were free to do likewise. Commanding officers were then empowered to refer cases directly to the Local Army Welfare Officer in whose area a soldier's wife lived, if that soldier was serving in Britain, or via the Overseas Department of S.S.A.F.A. if the soldier was serving overseas. Once in receipt of a case, the Local Army Welfare Officers either visited the soldier's wife to investigate the matter with a view to effecting a possible reconciliation, or arranged for probation officers who were willing to give up their spare time to undertake this task. A report was then submitted to the commanding officer on the outcome of the investigation before further action was taken by the soldier.¹¹³ The fact that some 44,000 divorce applications, of the 94,000 dealt with through the Army Legal Aid Scheme between 1942 and 1945, were subsequently abandoned, gave grounds to believe, it was concluded, that the Reconciliation Scheme had achieved a measure of

¹¹³ Adam IV, Notes for S. of S.'s Estimates Speech, February 1943; *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, p. 29; "A.C.I. 440 of 1943. Soldier's Wives and Families - Cessation of Normal Domestic Relations or Temporary Estrangement - Procedure for Attempting Reconciliation, and Action in Connexion with the Issue of Family Allowance or Compulsory Stoppage," Appendix "G" to *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, pp. 73-76; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 37; WO 277/4, "Extracts from 'The Soldier's Welfare'," Appendix 5 to Morgan, pp. 240-245; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 53; Atkinson, p. 40.

success.¹¹⁴

Indeed, a further problem, and one arising in large part from matrimonial disputes but also from a variety of other concerns such as difficulties over insurances, tenancies, building society obligations and hire purchase agreements, was the need to provide the troops with some form of legal assistance in civil matters. In some areas Local Army Welfare Officers were able to procure the services of a civilian Honorary Army Welfare Solicitor who was willing to advise or act on behalf of soldiers without charge.¹¹⁵ However, it soon became apparent that for troops with insufficient means to engage a private lawyer, the legal facilities available to them were inadequate. In the first instance, whilst soldiers could obtain legal advice from such voluntary bodies as the Citizens' Advice Bureaux or the Poor Man's Lawyer Societies, these organizations were too few and scattered to be able to deal with more than a fraction of the cases that came before them as a result of the practical and legal problems created by the war.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the position was complicated by the fact that not only was

¹¹⁴ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 35, 95; Willans, p. 249; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 53.

¹¹⁶ *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, Cmd. 6641 (May 1945), chap. 1, p. 6, chap. 4, pp. 17-18, 20-21; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 35-36; WO 163/88, "Army Legal Aid Scheme," Memorandum by Sir Claud Schuster, 17 March 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)34., 24 March 1942.

there little organized provision for those on low incomes to conduct litigation in the inferior courts beyond what assistance Poor Man's Lawyers were able to give,¹¹⁷ but the official Poor Persons Procedure that enabled proceedings to be taken in the High Court, which was the tribunal that settled divorce cases and to which the bulk of Poor Persons work was addressed, was found to be inappropriate for the needs of a wartime conscript Army.

Under the Poor Persons Procedure, which operated in England and Wales and was run along similar lines in Scotland, those persons whose income from all sources did not exceed £2 a week, or in special circumstances £4, and who desired to prosecute or defend an action in the High Court, submitted an application either to their local Law Society's Poor Persons Committee, or to the Law Society's Poor Persons Committee in London. If the appropriate committee was satisfied that the income of the applicant was within the prescribed limits and that the case was sound, it was empowered to grant a Poor Persons Certificate. This certificate excused the applicant the payment of court fees and entitled him to the services of a solicitor to prepare his case and counsel to conduct it in court. These were drawn from a panel of lawyers who had agreed to act in cases of this type.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice to England and Wales*, chap. 3, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁸ *Idid.*, chap. 1, pp. 1-4, chap. 3, pp. 11-12; WO 163/88, "Army Legal Aid Scheme."

However, as the war developed not only did the Poor Persons Procedure begin to break down by virtue of the fact that increasing numbers of solicitors and counsel were called up into the Services, and the remainder were so fully occupied with their ordinary clients that they found it increasingly difficult to deal with Poor Persons work, but particular difficulties presented themselves in the case of servicemen. In the first instance, the fact that a serviceman was usually removed from his home locality and thus ceased to have easy access to the sources of advice normally open to him, hindered his ability to take advantage of the procedure. But even if he was in a position to obtain a certificate, it was difficult for him to prosecute his remedy since the necessary witnesses and other evidence important to his case were far distant from him and he was not master of his own time. The problem was further compounded by confusion over whether servicemen actually qualified as Poor Persons under the financial regulations as they stood. The system of pay and allowances operated in the Army made it difficult for Poor Persons Committees to state with any certainty what the weekly income of a soldier in the ranks actually was. Taking into account that part of his income which he might have received in kind, it was clear that it frequently exceeded £2 a week

and even the extreme limit of £4.¹¹⁹

It was in these circumstances, and with the view being taken that as the state had often created problems for soldiers by taking them away from their homes so it had an obligation towards them, that in the Summer of 1941 the Welfare Directorate proposed the institution of a new Army Legal Aid Scheme.¹²⁰ Following consideration of the proposals by an expert committee under Sir Claud Schuster, the Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, and with the strong backing of General Adam, the scheme was presented to the E.C.A.C. in March 1942.¹²¹ Under the scheme, Legal Advice Bureaux were to be set up wherever possible in units in Home Commands. Located in C.V.W.W huts or other convenient places, they were to be staffed by serving solicitors and barristers on a part-time basis, or by available civilians who were willing to forego some of their spare time, and were to give advice to soldiers on civil matters that they might have hoped to obtain from the Citizens' Advice Bureaux or Poor Man's Lawyer Societies in civilian life. Open to all soldiers

¹¹⁹ *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, chap. 1, p. 5; The Law Society, *Poor Persons Procedure. Report for the Year ended the 31st December, 1942*, p. 52; WO 163/87, "Legal Aid to Officers, Men and Women in the Services," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)16., 4 February 1942; WO 163/88, "Army Legal Aid Scheme."

¹²⁰ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 36.

¹²¹ WO 163/87, E.C.A.C./P(42)16; WO 163/87, Minutes of the 45th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)6., 6 February 1942; WO 163/88, "Army Legal Aid Scheme."

and non-commissioned officers who could not otherwise afford the costs of private legal advice, the Bureaux were to deal with such cases that required simple solutions and if litigation was required in the inferior courts they were empowered to assist soldiers in finding a Poor Man's Lawyer or some other civilian solicitor to act on their behalf.¹²²

However, if a case was too complex to be dealt with without reference to text books or seemed likely to result in litigation in the High Court, it was to be forwarded to Command Legal Branches, or Command Legal Aid Sections as they subsequently became known, which were to be set up in every Home Command. Composed of full-time senior serving solicitors and barristers, they were either to give further advice on those cases referred to them by the Legal Advice Bureaux, or if action in the High Court was required, were to proceed in one of two ways. In all non-matrimonial cases, the Sections were to arrange for applications for certificates to be sent to the local Law Society's Poor Persons Committee nearest an applicant's home for consideration in the normal way. In matrimonial matters, though, the Sections were first to satisfy themselves that a prima facie case existed and if necessary were to ascertain the names of witnesses and arrange for statements to be taken either by their own

¹²²WO 163/88, "Army Legal Aid Scheme."

staffs or by the nearest Legal Aid Bureau. Once this had been done arrangements were to be made for applications to be sent either to the appropriate local Poor Persons Committee, or if that committee was not readily in a position to deal with the case, to the London Poor Persons Committee. If a certificate was granted by the London Committee it was to refer the matter to a new Law Society Services Divorce Department set up specifically to conduct the matrimonial cases of those in the Forces.^{1 2 3}

Furthermore, it was proposed that the arbitrary means test under which applicants were granted certificates by the Poor Persons Committees should be amended in the case of servicemen. Although it was specified that facilities should not be made available to those who, in the opinion of the committees, possessed such private means that they could not reasonably be considered as Poor Persons, it was recommended that all servicemen up to the rank of sergeant should be entitled to assistance regardless of their weekly pay and allowances.^{1 2 4}

Subject to the provisos that the scheme was to be essentially advisory, that those serving on Legal Advice Bureaux and Command Legal Aid Sections would not implement advice or conduct any litigation in

^{1 2 3} Ibid.

^{1 2 4} Ibid.

contravention of the Solicitors Act, and that no questions relating to criminal or military law would be dealt with,¹²⁵ the E.C.A.C. and the Secretary of State gave their approval to the establishment of the Legal Aid Scheme, and with the agreement of the relevant civilian legal authorities it was instituted under the administrative control of the Welfare Directorate in July 1942.¹²⁶ The R.A.F. was invited to participate and did so from October 1942, but the Navy declined and set up its own independent service in July 1943.¹²⁷ The scheme applied initially to troops stationed in England and Wales, with complementary arrangements made for those in Scotland. Steps were, however, taken in 1943 to extend it overseas and similar facilities were set up in the Middle East, Italy, South East Asia and North West Europe, with the London District Command Legal Aid Section acting as a

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ WO 163/88, Minutes of the 52nd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./P(42)13., 27 March 1942; WO 163/88, Minutes of the 53rd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)14., 3 April 1942; WO 163/51, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(42)28., July 1942; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 381 (1941-42), col. 1382; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 36-37; The Law Society, *Poor Persons Procedure. Report for the Year Ended the 31st December, 1942*, pp. 52, 60-65; *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, chap. 1, pp. 5-6, chap. 3, pp. 13-15, chap. 4, pp. 21-22.

¹²⁷ *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, chap. 4, p. 21.

clearing house for cases referred from abroad.¹²⁸

The Legal Aid Scheme was never free from delays because of the shortage of civilian lawyers, and could be disrupted by the sudden posting of legal advisers away from units.¹²⁹ Moreover, it was criticized in some quarters for prohibiting those serving on the Legal Advice Bureaux and Legal Aid Sections from taking any effective action on behalf of servicemen, and being limited to soldiers up to the rank of sergeant when many warrant officers and junior officers were unable to pay private lawyers.¹³⁰ However, by the end of 1945 it had dealt with some 175,000 cases of all types, of which 140,000 were concerned with matrimonial affairs. Of these cases, some 94,000 divorce applications were made of which 50,000 were carried through to a conclusion.¹³¹

Besides the organization of the Legal Aid Scheme, Army Welfare further became involved in the granting of compassionate leave and similar concessions to the troops. From the beginning of the war soldiers facing

¹²⁸ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 36-37; WO 163/52, War Office Progress Report, A.C./G(43)30., October 1943; *Report of the Committee on Legal Aid and Legal Advice in England and Wales*, chap. 1, p. 5, chap. 4, p. 22; Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 5.

¹²⁹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 37; J. Maclaren-Ross, *The Stuff to Give the Troops. Twenty-Five Tales of Army Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp. 135-141.

¹³⁰ A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 53; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 387 (1942-43), cols. 430-431.

¹³¹ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 37.

urgent domestic hardship could be granted periods of compassionate leave at the discretion of commanding officers, and this was subsequently extended to enable soldiers to apply either for temporary release, compassionate posting to units near their homes, retention in the United Kingdom or reversion to the Home Establishment. However, with the growing volume of hardship cases and the necessity of ensuring uniformity between units, from 1942 the granting of these concessions was centralized in the Adjutant-General's Department in the War Office, although the final decision on cases of reversion to the Home Establishment remained with overseas commands.¹³² In the Middle East, and subsequently copied in other commands, these decisions were taken by a specially convened committee of officers and other ranks which was seen as the fairest method of dealing with these matters.¹³³

The problem for the War Office, though, was to frame a policy that would balance the claims of human sympathy with the pressing manpower requirements of the Army, and to assist in this matter a reporting procedure was established. Under this procedure, compassionate

¹³² WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 31-32; "A.C.I. 1182 of 1942. Release from Military Service, Retention in the United Kingdom, Posting Nearer Home, etc., Temporarily on Compassionate Grounds. - Other Ranks (excluding A.T.S.)," Appendix "E" to *The Soldier's Welfare*, 1943, pp. 66-69; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 385 (1942-43), cols. 1414-1415.

¹³³ Captain X, p. 30; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 404 (1943-44), cols. 1234-1238.

applications were submitted either directly to the War Office for those troops at home, or through the Overseas Department of S.S.A.F.A. for those abroad. These were investigated by Local Army Welfare Officers, together with members of S.S.A.F.A., the Help Society and other voluntary organizations, who, after visiting a soldier's home and collecting appropriate evidence, submitted a report on the case to the War Office. On the basis of this report the War Office then either made a decision itself if the soldier was serving at home, or made a recommendation to the appropriate overseas command.¹³⁴

Between 1942 and 1945 some 900,000 compassionate applications were received from home and overseas commands, with soldiers either making applications themselves, or increasingly as the war came to an end, relatives approaching the War Office on their behalf. In January 1945 alone the War Office received nearly 2,000 personal callers on these matters.¹³⁵

On top of all this, Army Welfare also came to play a role in the resettlement of servicemen in civilian life. Ultimate responsibility for resettlement lay with the

¹³⁴ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 32-34; WO 277/4, "Welfare Memorandum. To All Welfare Officers," 20 July 1943, Appendix 12 to Morgan, pp. 257-258; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 404 (1943-44), cols. 1233-1238; A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 53.

¹³⁵ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 32; WO 163/96, "Compassionate Reversion to the Home Establishment. Personal Applications Received at the War Office," Memorandum by A.C.S., E.C.A.C./P(45)18., 19 February 1945.

Ministry of Labour and National Service who in 1944 laid down plans for the establishment of Resettlement Advice Bureaux across the country and a series of training schemes for ex-servicemen.¹³⁶ Yet the view was held by General Adam and others that not only should use be made of the knowledge and experience of voluntary organizations and others concerned with Service welfare in the resettlement of ex-soldiers, but that the War Office had a certain moral responsibility for the welfare of its former employees. Accordingly, following a meeting with the Ministry of Labour in November 1944, it was agreed that the Director-General of the Territorial Army, in consultation with the Welfare Directorate, should sponsor a system of Service Contact Officers. Drawn from amongst members of S.S.A.F.A., The Help Society, The National Association for Employment of Ex-Regular Soldiers, the British Legion and other similar bodies, these Contact Officers were to be attached to Resettlement Advice Bureaux and offer specialist advice to ex-soldiers if required.¹³⁷ At the same time the Welfare Directorate was given the task of liaising with the Ministry of Labour's Appointments Department over the

¹³⁶ H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower. A Study of War-time Policy and Administration* (London: HMSO and Longmans, Green & Co., 1957), pp. 263-266, 270-271.

¹³⁷ WO 163/95, "Co-operation by the Services with the Ministry of Labour Resettlement Advice Bureaux," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(44)103., 24 December 1944; WO 163/95, Minutes of the 194th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(44)52., 30 December 1944.

civil employment of ex-officers, and was made responsible for the collection of information on resettlement matters. This was passed to the Army Education authorities who edited a monthly Resettlement Bulletin and distributed it to the troops.¹³⁸

In relation to resettlement matters, of further note was the establishment of special Civil Resettlement Units (C.R.U.s) for repatriated prisoners-of-war, under the administrative control of the Adjutant-General's Directorate of Organization. Drawing on the psychological difficulties in adjustment experienced by prisoners after the First World War and during the early years of the Second, and taking the view that the Army had a moral responsibility in this field, Army psychiatrists submitted the plans for such a scheme to the War Office in 1944. Although this met with considerable resistance from some senior officers who either regarded the prisoner-of-war as a "military offender" and undeserving of special treatment, or thought that these facilities were simply unnecessary, General Adam took the matter personally to Sir James Grigg, who accepted it and negotiated the consent of the Cabinet the following day. Early in 1945 the first C.R.U. was established and by the end of the year twenty had been set up across the

¹³⁸ WO 32/14569, "Organisation and Responsibilities of the Army Welfare Service," Appendix "B" to S.C.W./P(47)3., 9 October 1947.

country, overseen by a planning staff which included a psychiatrist, Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. T. Wilson, and a psychologist, Lieutenant-Colonel E. L. Trist. These units were attended by former prisoners on a voluntary basis and, staffed by military personnel assisted by civilian liaison officers, they provided a range of personnel selection advice, vocational training facilities and welfare and psychiatric support, all conducted in an informal atmosphere designed to ease the process of transition. Indeed, in a follow-up study of prisoners in 1946, it was found that whilst 74% of those that had attended C.R.U.s showed evidence of successful resettlement, only 35% of non-attenders were considered to be adjusting satisfactorily.¹³⁹

As an adjunct to all the welfare services developed during the war, it was notable that these years also saw the establishment of welfare committees of all ranks in a number of units in Home Commands. In the pre-war Army a system of regular mess meetings existed so as to enable soldiers' representatives to voice their opinion to officers on food matters.¹⁴⁰ However, during the war the commanders of some formations, such as the Guards Armoured Division, set up welfare committees to allow consultation between officers and men on any welfare

¹³⁹ Ahrenfeldt, pp. 226-250; Adam VIII, chap. 11, pp. 2-6.

¹⁴⁰ Captain X, p. 29.

matter that was causing concern.¹⁴¹ In fact, one District Commander so valued these welfare committees that he issued instructions that they were to be presided over personally by commanding officers who were to take immediate decisions on matters arising from their deliberations. "The measure of the need for a Welfare Conference," he noted, "will be the outspoken character of the first few sessions."¹⁴² These developments received official recognition with the announcement in March 1947 that instructions had been sent out that welfare committees were to be set up throughout the Army.¹⁴³

During the war, then, a vast and complex Army Welfare organization was built up, involved in the provision of everything from cups of tea to advice on family allowances, and coming to encompass sixteen branches within the Welfare Directorate and, it was estimated, some 900,000 voluntary welfare workers.¹⁴⁴ Certainly, there was evidence to suggest that its work made an important contribution towards sustaining morale. Not

¹⁴¹ WO 163/53, Morale Report, November 1943-January 1944, A.C./G(44)22., 23 May 1944.

¹⁴² WO 163/54, Appendix "B" to Morale Report, February-April 1945, A.C./G(45)15., 20 August 1945.

¹⁴³ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 435 (1946-47), col. 1319.

¹⁴⁴ WO 32/14569, "Organization of the Directorate of Army Welfare Services," Annexure I to Appendix "B", S.C.W./P(47)3; WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 171-172.

only did Army morale reports draw attention to the value of the welfare efforts made on the soldier's behalf,¹⁴⁵ but in June 1945 Major-General Viscount Bridgeman, Deputy Adjutant-General at the War Office, went as far as to conclude that:

It must be accepted... that Army Welfare has come to stay; that it is an indispensable factor in maintaining morale and that without it the modern soldier cannot be enabled to reproduce in his Army life conditions which, in his estimation,¹⁴⁶ are sufficiently civilised to be tolerable.

At the forefront of much of the welfare effort at home, and singled out for special praise by General Adam,¹⁴⁷ were the Local Army Welfare Officers. They had an especially onerous task. Having organized a range of comforts, amenities and recreational facilities for the 18,000 troops in his area, as well as interviewing over 6,000 soldiers with personal problems,¹⁴⁸ one welfare officer noted:

For six years my work as L.A.W.O. has been a whole time job, and the typing of letters has rarely been completed until 11 p.m., and even after dinner and on Sundays one was not safe from

¹⁴⁵ WO 163/54, Morale Report, August-October 1944, A.C./G(45)2., 17 February 1945; WO 163/54, Morale Report, November 1944-January 1945, A.C./G(45)12., 4 July 1945; WO 163/54, Morale Report, February-April 1945, A.C./G(45)15., 20 August 1945.

¹⁴⁶ WO 32/14569, "The Army Welfare Services after the War," Memorandum by D.A.G.(A)., 16 June 1945.

¹⁴⁷ A Local Army Welfare Officer, p. 55; Adam VIII, chap. 6, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴⁸ A Local Army Welfare Officer, pp. 52, 54.

urgent visits of soldiers and their relatives. There was generally one telephone call during every meal, and on returning from the morning round of visits there was always a list of messages awaiting one. The daily round was in fact very much like that of a busy doctor - visits, consultations at home, telephone and correspondence.¹⁴⁹

Besides a good deal of stamina, Local Army Welfare Officers also required a certain bravado at times. As another recalled:

A C.O. in another part of the country asked me to do whatever I could for one of his men whose wife, living in a semi-detached building with her four children, had been, to say the least of it, indiscreet. The woman next door was making life uncomfortable for her in a manner which savoured of 'blackmail'. It was necessary to call two or three times on the wife and I also made two calls on the woman next door. The first visit to the latter disclosed that I might also be the subject of 'blackmail' unless I was careful. During the second visit I listened in silence for some time to a species of vituperation which is the outcome of careful thought on the part of a woman whose character and reputation are not as good as she is careful to advertise. Having heard enough I took up the attack. 'I have on me,' I said, 'a portable dictograph which has recorded all you have said and none of which you can prove on oath. The punishment for blackmail is about two years penal servitude.' Whether I really carried a dictograph is my own affair.¹⁵⁰

Despite the value of the Army Welfare organization in sustaining morale, there were, though, factors which tended to limit its effectiveness. Apart from the problems inherent in coordinating the numerous voluntary

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁵⁰ Atkinson, p. 40.

organizations, the fact that at their peak number there were only 1,500 voluntary welfare officers appointed to serve all the troops across Britain, inevitably meant it was difficult to provide a comprehensive service for every unit.¹⁵¹ Moreover, from their inception they were hampered by never being truly integrated into the machinery of the Army. At the local level, the constant movement of units around the country, often with no notice or prior warning, tended to frustrate the efforts of Local Army Welfare Officers to provide a continuity of welfare provision.¹⁵² At a higher level, the fact that the Command Welfare Officer was never even nominally a member of the military staff of Home Commands, could often lead to confusion over welfare policy.¹⁵³ Indeed, the Welfare Directorate's appreciation of the realities of welfare work across the country could often be at odds with the experience of those at ground level. As one Local Army Welfare Officer recalled:

Almost four times a year County Army Welfare Conferences were held and sometimes attended by a staff officer from Army Welfare Service. These officers seemed to understand little of the duties of a L.A.W.O. One of them asked me whether a soldier had ever come to me for advice; he appeared to be under the impression that our duties were confined to entertainments, canteens and woollens. It is the old story of the staff officer with no regimental experience. The Directorate of A.W.S. would be more efficient if

¹⁵¹ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 94, 171.

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 83-84; Atkinson, pp. 39-40.

¹⁵³ WO 277/4, Morgan, pp. 27, 74, 173-174.

every member of it was attached to a busy L.A.W.O., for say two weeks, accompanied him on his daily round, attended his interviews at home, read all his correspondence and listened in to all his telephone calls. In 1941 the Director-General issued a directive to all L.A.W.O.s, exhorting them to organize canteens, concerts and cinemas on every isolated searchlight site. At that date in our county the total accommodation for each site was one small Nissen hut and three bell tents with three hurricane lamps!¹⁵⁴

Perhaps more importantly, there was evidence to suggest that a number of regular officers regarded the welfare organization with the utmost suspicion, seeing it not only as a dangerous pampering of the troops, but above all as undermining the traditional responsibility of regimental officers for the welfare of their men. As Brigadier Cyril Morgan, former Deputy-Director of Army Welfare, noted:

In the British Army the welfare of the soldier, in the sense in which the term is commonly understood, has always been regarded as the responsibility of the regimental officer. This principle is fundamental to our whole tradition of military leadership. Welfare is inextricably woven into the tradition of man-management, which is a prime function of the officer.... It was so tenaciously held by many senior officers in the Second World War that they looked askance upon the introduction of a central welfare organization at the War Office and the appointment of local army welfare officers who were not connected with any particular formation or unit.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, it was clear that this view was held by a number of commanding officers of units, the majority of whom

¹⁵⁴ A Local Army Welfare Officer, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵⁵ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 1.

were regulars, and upon whose cooperation much of the success of the scheme depended. As Morgan recalled:

... from the outset, there had been an underlying suspicion that the appointment of voluntary civilian welfare officers meant either the introduction of the atmosphere of the well-meaning aunt or else the creation of a system of commissars who might drive a wedge between the officers and their men. There had been a marked tendency to regard the visit of the welfare officer as a possible source of danger in that it might afford the opportunity to disgruntled men to air their grievances otherwise than through the proper channels. The command welfare officer, Scottish Command, had drawn attention to one aspect of this point in his first annual report, but the suspicion was by no means confined to that command and persisted for some time.¹⁵⁶

The implications of this for Army Welfare seemed clear. Not only was there evidence of resentment on the part of some commanding officers towards what was regarded as a "spoon feeding" organization imposed on the Army which merely served to interfere with its more important tasks,¹⁵⁷ but without the positive encouragement of their C.Os it was evident that a number of junior officers either chose not to utilize the welfare assistance available to them, or simply remained ignorant of it. As one commanding officer of an Army Selection Centre commented in the Autumn of 1943:

I am convinced that many officers know little of the value and purpose of Welfare Officers, and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁵⁷ WO 199/1685, "The Responsibility of the Unit Commander," Memorandum by B.G.S., Southern Command, 25 March 1942.

therefore it follows that few of the men even know of their existence. I know pamphlets galore have been issued, and here again the C.O. of the Battalion must ensure that this information is circulated and I think it¹⁵⁸ requires a mention at almost every conference.

In similar terms, a District Commander noted:

There is considerable evidence that in many units insufficient interest is being taken by officers in their men's private affairs and domestic worries.... In spite of many pamphlets issued on the subject, there appear to be still many officers who know little of the value and purpose of Welfare Officers.¹⁵⁹

Commenting on the welfare facilities available in the large Royal Army Ordinance Corps Depot in which he worked, one soldier wrote in 1942:

Apparently there is also a military welfare officer. I, and everybody else that I know, was completely unaware of his existence until a notice appeared in orders a few days ago to the effect that he was to be consulted in cases of air raids, damage and casualties. The same notice went on to point out at some length that this welfare officer was not to be bothered with any soldier's 'grumble' or 'grievance' (the army's inverted commas as if to indicate that a soldier could not possibly have a genuine grumble or grievance).

How long this welfare officer has been here, where he is, how he can be contacted, whether he is full or part time, are all points on which I have no information.¹⁶⁰

With Army Welfare forbidden to interfere in the

¹⁵⁸ WO 163/53, Appendix "A" to Morale Report, August-October 1943, A.C./G(44)4., 11 January 1944.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ M.O.-A., FR 1105, 10 March 1942.

internal welfare arrangements made within units, it thus seemed evident that many soldiers continued to rely largely on their junior officers to cater for their welfare needs.¹⁶¹ The problem was, as we have seen in the previous discussion of man-management, that a number of these officers showed little interest in the well-being of the men under their command. Indeed, this was confirmed by the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Detention Barracks, which concluded in 1943:

They [the Committee] desire to emphasise as strongly as possible the importance of good welfare work in the units from which the men come, as the principal means of saving men from getting into the trouble which leads to detention. They consider that if the admirable Notes for Officers issued by the Adjutant-General under the title 'The Soldier's Welfare,' were fully carried into effect, particularly by Company and Platoon Officers, perhaps as many as fifty per cent. of those who are now soldiers under sentence would never have had to be committed to detention.¹⁶²

It was ironic that the very existence of the Army Welfare organization could lead in some instances to a decline in the standard of internal unit welfare. As one Army morale report commented in the Spring of 1942: "An idea is prevalent that all Welfare Officers are paid to attend to the Welfare side, so it is left to them to 'get on with

¹⁶¹ Welfare, letter to the Editor, *The Spectator* 165 (November 1940), p. 477.

¹⁶² *Report of the Prime Minister's Committee of Enquiry into Detention Barracks*, Cmd. 6484 (November 1943), p. 12.

the job'."¹⁶³ This view was corroborated by one soldier who wrote that "the existence of a Welfare Department in the Army has led some officers to suppose that their obligation to do 'welfare work' for their men has ceased."¹⁶⁴

In the Summer of 1945 the military authorities began to consider welfare provision for the post-war Army. Whilst it was conceded by the Army Post-War Problems Committee in January 1946 that a number of welfare services such as entertainment, broadcasting and newspapers could be provided by commercial agencies in peacetime, it was recommended that those services to which the soldier and the citizen had become accustomed in war had to continue whatever agency operated them. "If compulsory service remains," it was argued, "it will not do for the Army to treat the citizen soldier less well than in war."¹⁶⁵ However, it was perhaps unsurprising that with the reduction in the size of the Army, and without the urgency of wartime, not only was the Welfare Directorate dissolved in 1948 as a separate and distinctive entity within the Adjutant-General's department at the War Office and its functions merged into other directorates,

¹⁶³ WO 163/51, *Morale Report*, February-May 1942, A.C./G(42)20., 12 June 1942.

¹⁶⁴ Democritus, *What's Wrong With the Army* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1942), p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ WO 32/14569, "Future of the Army Welfare Service," Twenty-First Interim Report of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, A.P.W.P/P(46)4., 16 January 1946.

but in 1949 the decision was taken to abolish the voluntary welfare organization around the country, thereby ensuring that responsibility for the day-to-day welfare of the soldier would continue to lie first and foremost with regimental officers.¹⁶⁶ As Brigadier Morgan noted: "The wheel had come full circle."¹⁶⁷

During the war the military authorities instituted significant changes in both the organization and range of welfare provision for the Army. Whilst in the pre-war Army the welfare of the soldier was looked upon almost entirely as a matter for units and regimental officers, the War Office was compelled not only to establish for the first time a new official welfare organization in the Army to supplement their efforts, but to develop an unprecedented range of official welfare services that included not only the provision of extensive amenities and recreational facilities for the troops, but also of special assistance over problems of a personal or domestic nature. Indeed, what the experience of the war demonstrated was that the modern soldier needed to feel part of a truly caring institution if he was to function with full military efficiency. As Colonel John Sparrow noted:

¹⁶⁶ WO 32/14569, Extract from the Minutes of the 118th Meeting of the Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems, 20 October 1949.

¹⁶⁷ WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 175.

It showed that sufficient provisions for the welfare, refreshment and recreation of troops, and for the relief of their anxieties about domestic matters, may properly be classed as an operational need.¹⁶⁸

However, whilst some officers clearly resented the extent to which these welfare duties were taken over by the Army Welfare organization during the war, and were eager to see them fully restored to units and regimental officers in peacetime, it is perhaps relevant to record in this respect the findings of the investigation into the Army's Working Day in 1948, which reported that:

Though it is axiomatic that every Officer should be a 'Welfare Officer' to his men, this is not, certainly under present conditions, sufficient. In this connection it was regrettable to find a very large number of men who had never had the opportunity of talking to any of their own officers in a natural manner.¹⁶⁹

According to Trevor Royle, it was indicative of the post-war Services' indifference to the well-being of their men that the philanthropic efforts of voluntary organizations continued to be such an important adjunct to National Service life.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ WO 277/16, "Morale," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. H. A. Sparrow, 1949, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ WO 163/497, Second Report. Army Working Day Investigating Team, 17 October 1948.

¹⁷⁰ Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of their Lives. The National Service Experience 1945-63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), p. 125.

7. EDUCATION

Educational provision for the troops was another area of Army life which quickly provoked reassessment. During the final months of the First World War the Army Council belatedly came to recognize the value of adult education in sustaining morale, and under the direction of Major Lord Gorell sought to organize a range of voluntary lectures and classes for the troops on non-military subjects, with the aim of occupying them in their off-duty hours and returning them to civil life better informed and qualified citizens than before. However, whilst this represented a significant advance on anything that had previously been organized by the Army in this field, and was followed in 1919 by the announcement that education was henceforth to be regarded as an integral part of Army training, and by the establishment of an Army Educational Corps (A.E.C.) in 1920 to organize educational provision, the reductions in military expenditure in the inter-war years, and the need to cut back anything that did not appear directly relevant to military efficiency, meant that education in the inter-war Regular Army was largely reduced to the elementary instruction of soldiers in military related subjects for the basic Army Certificates of Education, to which their

proficiency pay and chances of promotion were linked.¹ Indeed, W. E. Williams, who was to play a leading role in Army education during the Second World War, noted of this period that, shrunken in numbers and prestige, the A.E.C. was not only "deprived of its role of training men for citizenship and set to the task of peeling the educational potatoes," but had also "come to be considered as one of the lesser castes."²

Although steps were taken by Hore-Belisha in the late 1930s, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, to extend vocational training opportunities to soldiers towards the end of their service as part of the effort to promote recruitment,³ the passage of the Military Training Act in the Spring of 1939 did serve to focus attention in the War Office on the question of

¹ Prince Consort's Army Library, "The History of Army Education (1939-1945)," War Office Monograph by W. E. Williams, 1949 [hereafter Williams (1)], pp. 2, 4-5; Maj. T. H. Hawkins and L. J. F. Brimble, *Adult Education. The Record of the British Army* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1947), pp. 47-55, 66-68, 71-72, 74-75; Col. A. C. T. White, *The Story of Army Education 1643-1963* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1963), pp. 46-51, 56-58, 60, 70-73; Thomas Stevens, "Army Education," *Fabian Research Series* 5 (November 1940), pp. 101-102, 104-105; W. E. Williams, "Education in the Army," *Political Quarterly* 13 (July 1942) [hereafter Williams (2)], pp. 248-249; Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 163/98, Future of the Army Educational Corps. Sixteenth Interim Report of the Army Post-War Problems Committee, E.C.A.C./P(45)112., 6 November 1945.

² Williams (2), p. 248-249.

³ R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p. 45; Gerald F. Spillman, "Manpower problems in the British Army 1918-1939. The Balancing of Resources and Commitments" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1985), pp. 192-193.

educational provision for the Army. In anticipation of the demand for adult education facilities from militiamen who would have their civilian studies interrupted on their call up, and as a result of representations from civilian educational organizations, the War Office gave its consent to the drawing up of plans by the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.), the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) and the Universities, along with the Local Education Authorities and the Board of Education, for the establishment of a central coordinating committee and a network of regional committees to offer a range of voluntary adult education classes to militiamen on non-military subjects, with the A.E.C. acting as the link between this organization and the militiamen.⁴ However, not only were these plans put into abeyance by the War Office on the outbreak of war on the grounds that as the militia had been merged into the Regular Forces they now no longer applied,⁵ but the decision was taken that normal peacetime education had no place in an Army under active service conditions and the bulk of the A.E.C. were transferred to cipher duties.⁶

⁴Williams (1), pp. 5-6; Hawkins and Brimble, p. 97; Lieut. T. H. Hawkins, "Education in the British Army," *Nature* 151 (April 1943), p. 438; N. Scarlyn Wilson, *Education in the Forces 1939-46. The Civilian Contribution* (London: Evans Bros., 1948), pp. 1-2; WO 32/4725, "Role of the A.E.C. in War," Paper by D.R.O., for consideration by the War Committee, n.d. [but February 1940].

⁵Wilson, p. 2.

⁶WO 32/4725, "Role of the A.E.C. in War"; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 91-92.

For the first few months of the war official education in the Army virtually ceased.

In the same way, though, that the War Office was compelled to reconsider its attitude to welfare provision, so in the early months of 1940 it was also forced to reconsider its attitude to education. In defiance of the military authorities, the W.E.A., the Y.M.C.A. and the Universities revived the plans drawn up before the war and in January 1940 formed a Central Advisory Council for Education in H.M. Forces (C.A.C.), and a network of twenty-three Regional Committees to provide lectures and classes for the troops, whose activities soon revealed a demand for education from amongst citizen soldiers deprived of their normal peacetime studies.⁷ At the same time, the military authorities were subjected to a good deal of pressure from parliament and the press to coordinate these activities, with Lord Gorell, and educationalists such as H. A. L. Fisher and A. D. Lindsay, publicly criticising the Army for its neglect of educational provision and calling for the return of the A.E.C. to supervise

⁷ Wilson, pp. 3-5; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 98-99; Williams (1), pp. 6-7.

educational activity in the Army.⁸

In consideration of these developments there was some disagreement within the War Office. Whilst there were those, such as the Director of Military Training, Major-General C. C. Malden, and the Director of Recruiting and Organization, Major-General L. H. K. Finch, who argued that some means had to be found to correlate the educational facilities available with the needs of the troops, and that the A.E.C. was the best instrument to do this,⁹ there were others, such as T. J. Cash of the Directorate of Finance, who continued to oppose the concept of education for the wartime Army and maintained that what the troops required was welfare rather than educational provision. In February 1940, he recorded:

At the risk of appearing a Philistine, I adhere to the view which the Army Council formed in peace-time that there is no place for organised 'Army Education' in war-time, in an Army composed of all classes, from highly educated to illiterate, engaged in fighting or preparing to fight, and that what is wanted is mainly mental and physical relaxation rather than systematic

⁸ *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 356 (1939-40), cols. 361-363; Gorell, letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 18 January 1940, p. 7; H. A. L. Fisher, letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 18 January 1940, p. 7; A. D. Lindsay, letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 9 February 1940, p. 6; Hawkins and Brimble, p. 98.

⁹ WO 32/4725, Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Committee Assembled to Discuss the War-Time Role and Organization of the Army Educational Corps, 14 February 1940; WO 32/4725, "Role of the A.E.C. in War."

education.¹⁰

However, what convinced the War Office that some action needed to be taken in this field was the growing concern over the morale and efficiency of the Army, and in particular the mood of boredom and apathy which seemed to have overtaken the troops as the "phoney war" dragged on.¹¹ In contrast with the mood of their fathers of 1914, there was little enthusiasm for the war amongst new recruits. They joined up because they were ordered to and their priority was to get the job over with as quickly as possible. Yet here they were, the majority of them, sitting around in camps in Britain with all the restrictions and monotony that that entailed, and taking no active part in the war effort. The mood of the soldiers was well summed up by Bishop Hensley Henson, who noted in March 1940:

I am distressed to hear from many sides that the prevailing temper of the troops is a half cynical boredom, as remote as possible from the high crusading fervour which their situation authorises and requires.... They have neither the enthusiasm of youth nor the deliberate purpose of age, but just acquiesce in an absurd and

¹⁰ WO 32/4725, D.F.(b) to D.R.O., 12 February 1940, Appendix to Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Committee Assembled to Discuss the War-Time Role and Organization of the Army Educational Corps.

¹¹ WO 199/1644, Minutes of the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief's Conference, Southern Command, 29 January 1940; WO 163/48, Notes of the Proceedings of a Meeting of the Army Council, A.C.M.(O.S.)5., 12 February 1940.

unwelcome necessity.¹²

Education, it was considered, might prove a more effective means of sustaining morale than canteens and concert parties alone, and it was in this context that in the Spring of 1940 the Army Council gave the Haining Committee the task of drawing up a scheme of adult education for the troops to go alongside its welfare provision,¹³ and, following the defeat at Dunkirk which promised a further period of inactivity and brought fresh concerns over morale, consented to its recommendations in August.¹⁴

The Haining Scheme, the details of which were encapsulated in a pamphlet entitled *Education in the War Time Army*, was announced to Home Commands in September 1940. Under the scheme, which was to be voluntary and take place in off-duty hours, a range of subjects were to be offered to the troops, including the humanities, the utilities and hobby interests. The providers of education were to be the Army's own internal resources in the form

¹² H. H. Henson, diary entry, March 1940; quoted in Penelope Summerfield, "Education and Politics in the British Armed Forces in the Second World War," *International Review of Social History* 26 (1981), p. 136.

¹³ WO 163/49, "Lord Gorell's Scheme for Education in the Army and Air Force," Memorandum by U.S. of S., O.S.25., n.d [but February 1940]; WO 163/48, Notes of a Meeting of the Army Council, A.C.M.(O.S)10., 4 March 1940; Hawkins and Brimble, p. 100.

¹⁴ WO 277/4, "Army Welfare," War Office Monograph compiled by Brig. M. C. Morgan, 1953, p. 23; Maj.-Gen. C. Lloyd, *British Services Education* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1950), p. 16.

of serving teachers and lecturers, and those of C.A.C.'s Regional Committees, Local Education Authorities and any other civilian bodies willing to help. An Education Officer was to be appointed from amongst suitable regimental officers in each unit to stir up interest amongst the troops, a Unit Education Committee of all ranks set up to assist him, and an expanded A.E.C. was to return to educational work to coordinate demand with supply. The scheme was to be supervised by a new Directorate of Education in the War Office under F. W. D. Bendall, a civil servant seconded from the Board of Education, who was to work closely with the Directorate of Welfare; this arrangement being formalized in December 1940 with the appointment of General Willans as Director-General of Welfare and Education; the Adjutant-General, General Adam, assuming overall responsibility for both these areas in the Summer of 1941.¹⁵ The aim of the scheme, *Education in the War Time Army* recorded, was to "combat boredom, and so have a strong and direct effect on morale and efficiency." But of note also was the hope that education might instil the troops with some "crusading fervour":

There should be constant opportunities of showing to all the destructive nature, both as regards material and culture, of the forces set against

¹⁵ WO 163/412, Report of the Committee on Educational, Welfare and Recreational Needs of the Army, 7 May 1940, pp. 4-19, 30-31; Williams (1), pp. 8-9, 11; WO 277/4, Morgan, p. 26; WO 163/92, "Army Education. Brief Note on Development from 1939-1943," by A.G., Appendix "A" to E.C.A.C./P(43)98., 3 September 1943.

us, and of illustrating how the British Empire stands for the essential factors of a new and better life.¹⁶

With the establishment of the scheme, a range of educational facilities became available to the Army over the Winter of 1940-41. Whilst a number of units began to organize their own educational activities, usually in the form of discussion groups,¹⁷ C.A.C.'s Regional Committees laid on some 9,500 lectures, short courses and classes for the troops on subjects which included politics, history, geography, economics, science, philosophy, music and art, and Local Education Authorities provided practical tuition in commerce, technology and handicrafts.¹⁸ At the end of 1940 arrangements were also made with the appropriate professional bodies for the institution of correspondence courses for the Army in such fields as banking, insurance, law and engineering, and by March 1941 some 5,000 soldiers had applied for

¹⁶ WO 32/9429, *Education in the War Time Army*, War Office, September 1940; quoted in Army Council Instruction 1415, November 1940.

¹⁷ Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 114-118; White, pp. 92-93.

¹⁸ Basil Yeaxlee, "Education for the Forces. The Scheme Gets Under Way," *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 1363 (1941), p. 275; Basil Yeaxlee, "Adult Education in H.M. Forces. The Central Advisory Council and Regional Committees," *Adult Education* 13 (June 1941), pp. 201-202; "Army Education. Progress in Liverpool Region," *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 1345 (1941), p. 61; "Education in the Forces," *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 1351 (1941), p. 131; "Education in the Forces. Lecturers' Course at Glasgow University," *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 1352 (1941), p. 150.

enrolment.¹⁹

Yet although these activities were set to continue and expand throughout the war years, it soon became evident to the military authorities that the Haining Scheme was not sustaining morale as effectively as had been hoped. In the first instance, it was clear that the soldiers, the majority of whom had received no organized education since the age of fourteen and associated it with all the restrictions of the elementary school classroom, had little interest in voluntary education in their spare time on what were perceived to be mainly scholarly subjects. Furthermore, the irregular duty hours, the posting of personnel, the movement of units around the country and the call up of civilian lecturers and tutors to the Forces, made it difficult to organize systematic educational provision even for those who wanted it. Moreover, the success of the scheme depended largely on the cooperation of commanding officers of units, and it was evident that a number of them regarded educational provision as either an unnecessary distraction or potentially subversive, and appointed the least suitable of their juniors as Unit Education Officers, hesitated to set up Unit Education Committees, failed to publicize educational activities or cancelled them as they saw

¹⁹ White, pp. 93-94; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 178-179; Maj.-Gen. H. Willans, "Army Education and Welfare," *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 86 (May 1941), pp. 259-260.

fit.²⁰ As one A.E.C. officer noted:

... one may safely say that the whole scheme depends upon the C.O.: if he is sympathetic, it will flourish; if he 'doesn't believe in education' then practically nothing will get a successful education scheme working in his unit.²¹

What all this amounted to was that by the Spring of 1941 it was estimated that 80% of the troops remained untouched by educational provision.²² It was in these circumstances, and with news of defeats in the Middle East and the prospect of a sedentary existence in camps in Britain for the foreseeable future conspiring to create fresh concerns over morale, that in the Summer of 1941 the War Office planned a further scheme of education for the Army.²³

²⁰ Williams (1), pp. 10-11; Williams (2), pp. 252-254; Wilson, pp. 10-11, 28-29, 31; White, pp. 88-89, 75-76; Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive [hereafter M.O.-A.], FR 686, 5 May 1941; Beryl Course, letter to the Editor, *The Times Educational Supplement* no. 1390 (1941), p. 607; Ex-Pioneer, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 21 (March 1941), p. 273; Thomas Kelly, "Some Lessons of Army Education," *Adult Education* 13 (June 1941), pp. 168-169; C. E. M. Joad, "Army Education - The Case for Compulsion," *The New Statesman and Nation* 22 (July 1941), p. 79; A W.E.A. Member now in the Forces, "More About Army Education," *The Highway* 35 (January 1943), p. 48; Hubert Webb, "Education and the Army: A Tutor's View," *The Highway* 25 (December 1943), p. 35; Harry Ross, "Army Education," *Fabian Quarterly*, no. 38 (July 1943), p. 21.

²¹ Divisional Education Officer, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 21 (April 1941), p. 412.

²² Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Adam Papers [hereafter Adam], Adam VIII, typescript narrative by Gen. Sir Ronald Adam on "Various Administrative Aspects of the Army during the Second World War," 1963, chap. 6, p. 3.

²³ Summerfield, p. 138.

The new scheme had its origins in an experiment carried out over the previous months by General Adam, then Commander-in-Chief, Northern Command. Adam had been concerned over the limitations of the Haining Scheme and the low morale of his troops, which he considered to be largely due to their lack of knowledge of the progress of the war and the reasons for which they were fighting; a problem compounded by the fact that many of them were cut off from normal newspaper and wireless facilities.²⁴ As William Shebbeare confirmed:

I had imagined when I joined the army that we should have some little talk from our Commanding Officer on the motives for which Britain fought; and that throughout our training it would be recognised that all these lads - conscripts and volunteers - were showing themselves ready to give everything, even their lives, for a great cause, and were therefore men to be respected.... The nearest recognition of this in my own experience was an N.C.O. who told us 'You are not here for punishment.'²⁵

In order to remedy this, Adam devised a system under which regimental officers held weekly discussions with their men during duty hours on current affairs topics, using information culled from the press. Although no official assistance was given to this venture, W. E. Williams, a civilian liaison officer touring commands for the Directorate of Education, brought back news of the

²⁴ Adam VIII, chap. 6, p. 3.

²⁵ Captain X [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), pp. 9-10.

experiment to the War Office and was invited by General Willans to draw up a similar scheme for the whole Army.²⁶

Having outlined the shortcomings of the existing Haining Scheme, General Willans submitted the new education scheme in a paper to the Executive Committee of the Army Council (E.C.A.C.) on 5 June. In order to appeal to the troops, and thus sustain their morale more effectively, it was recommended that the scheme should concentrate specifically on current affairs rather than scholastic subjects. Willans recorded:

Education in this sense would lead to a better appreciation of the real objects for which we are fighting and opens up a wider and more promising prospect. It cannot be disputed that if we can employ men's minds and stimulate their interest by promoting knowledge, discussion and thought about the affairs of the world in which they live, we go far to maintain their morale, and thus to make them better soldiers. The longer the war lasts the more important this will be.²⁷

Furthermore, to ensure that this education reached all the troops, it was proposed that the scheme should be conducted by regimental officers in training time, rather than by educational experts in off-duty hours. Willans noted:

The officer must supply his men with information and must encourage them to discuss and to think and he must regard this as an integral part of his task. It must become part of the soldier's

²⁶ Adam VIII, chap. 6, pp. 3-4; Williams (1), pp. 13-14.

²⁷ WO 163/84, "Education in the Wartime Army," Memorandum by D.G.W.E., E.C.A.C./P(41)37., 5 June 1941.

life like his dinner or his sport or his route
march.²⁸

Moreover, to supply officers with the necessary literature, and drum up support for the enterprise in the Army, it was recommended that a new directorate be set up in the War Office to conduct the scheme, which would be separate from the Directorate of Education but come under the wing of the Director-General of Welfare and Education. The importance of winning over the support of commanding officers was particularly stressed by Willans:

The real difficulty is to supply the inspiration, which must come from the top. Too much stress cannot be laid on this; like everything else it is a matter for commanding officers.²⁹

In consideration of this new scheme there was a good deal of concern amongst senior figures in the War Office, the Secretary of State for War, Captain David Margesson, voicing his fears that it would serve to encourage political agitation within the Army, which was contrary to King's Regulations and all historical precedent, and doubting that the average junior officer had the ability to conduct the scheme satisfactorily.³⁰ Willans, though, persuasively countered these arguments:

A criticism of the foregoing Memorandum has been made on the grounds that it will lay the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ WO 32/9735, D.G.W.E. to P.U.S., 3 June 1941.

door open to political agitation within the Army. My answer is that the door is now open to political discussion of any kind; discussions are encouraged by the existing scheme. Moreover men who wish to discuss politics will discuss them and it is far better that they should do so openly in the light of the facts which have been intelligently and convincingly presented to them than they should do so in ignorance or behind closed doors. Indeed I strongly suggest the scheme will, in fact, militate against political agitation. The agitator invariably thrives where he is dealing with ignorant men or working in secret and fails when brought into open contact with facts and knowledge. I submit that this scheme is calculated to fortify men's minds with knowledge of the world and that, far from producing anything in the nature of subversive opinions, it will go a long way to strengthen morale and to combat boredom, which itself is the agitator's (and the German's) best friend.³¹

Turning to the second area of concern, he recorded:

A more serious criticism is inspired by a doubt of the ability of the present day officer to play his part in the scheme. My answer to that is that we entrust these officers with the lives of men and with the task of instructing them in the arts of war, some of which are complicated, all of which require ability and leadership. We can hardly sustain the suggestion that we cannot entrust the same officers with the task of instructing the same men about the affairs of the world in which they live.³²

Moreover, he added, the scheme would positively contribute towards improving the relationship between officers and men by affording a further point of contact between them.³³

³¹ WO 163/84, "Supplement to Memorandum on Education in the Wartime Army," by D.G.W.E., Annexure to E.C.A.C./P(41)37., 5 June 1941.

³² Ibid.

³³ WO 163/50, Minutes of the 8th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(41)8., 17 June 1941.

Although there continued to be an element of unease in the War Office, in view of the overriding need to sustain the morale of the troops, the fact that a similar experiment had been carried out successfully in Northern Command, and with the provisos that the material supplied to officers would be carefully edited in the War Office, and that commanding officers would require to be satisfied that their officers were imparting the instruction in a satisfactory manner and no party politics would enter into the discussions, the Secretary of State was persuaded to agree to the scheme, and, with the powerful support of General Adam who by this time had arrived at the War Office as Adjutant-General, it was passed by the E.C.A.C. on 9 June and given the consent of the full Army Council on 17 June.^{3 4}

During July the proposed directorate was set up in the War Office, under the title of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (A.B.C.A.), and W. E. Williams appointed Director. To Brigadier-General Lord Croft, the Conservative Parliamentary Under-Secretary who was to act as the political watchdog to Army education, this was a somewhat controversial appointment since Williams, as Secretary of the British Institute of Adult Education, Executive member of the Workers' Educational Association

^{3 4}WO 32/9735, D.G.W.E. to P.U.S., 3 June 1941; WO 163/84, Minutes of the 16th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(41)16., 9 June 1941; WO 163/50, A.C./M(41)8.

and Director of Penguin Books, enjoyed a distinctly reformist reputation.³⁵ However, as one of the leading young pioneers of popular education in the country, he was well regarded by Willans and Adam as having the necessary expertise and inspiration to supervise the scheme, and Croft contented himself with the Army Council's pronouncement that the scheme was to be non-political.³⁶

In August 1941 the details of the scheme were outlined to the Army in a pamphlet entitled *Current Affairs in the Army*. Regimental officers were instructed to hold classes with their sections or platoons once a week during training hours. The Directorate would supply officers with two pamphlets, *War* and *Current Affairs*, on which discussions could be based. *War* would chart the progress of the conflict and *Current Affairs* an analysis of broader topical issues. The A.E.C, which had been strengthened by the inclusion of wartime recruits, was to act as A.B.C.A.'s local agents and give officers any

³⁵ Churchill College, Cambridge, Lord Croft Papers [hereafter Croft], "Welfare and Education. A.B.C.A.," Memorandum by U.S. of S., 8 January 1943; Croft, "A.B.C.A. and Political Reactions," Memorandum by U.S. of S., n.d. [but 1943]. I am grateful to Dr. Paul Addison for providing me with copies of documents from this archive.

³⁶ Croft, "Welfare and Education. A.B.C.A."; S. P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale. Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 93-94.

assistance required.³⁷

The A.B.C.A. scheme was an important military development in a number of respects. Primarily, it marked the first occasion on which education was made compulsory amongst all units of a wartime British Army.³⁸ Furthermore, it seemed to embody a change in attitude towards the rank and file soldiers which, in the opinion of William Shebbeare, reversed the idea that they should not think for themselves or be interested in the world around them.³⁹ Moreover, it signified an important shift in the direction and purpose of wartime Army education. Whilst the aim of the scheme was still to sustain the morale and efficiency of the troops, a more specific potency was to be given to the instillation of "crusading fervour". Instead of merely offering opportunities for contrast between Britain and Germany, education was now to concentrate specifically on the objectives of the war in the hope that, in the tradition of Cromwell's Army, the soldier who understood the cause for which he fought was likely to be a more reliable soldier than one who did not.⁴⁰ More importantly, the scheme was to go further and attempt to teach the troops the rudiments of citizenship.

³⁷ WO 32/9735, *Current Affairs in the Army. The Outline of a New Plan*, War Office, August 1941.

³⁸ Hawkins and Brimble, p. 119.

³⁹ Captain X, p. 21.

⁴⁰ WO 32/9735, *Current Affairs in the Army. The Outline of a New Plan*.

As Current Affairs in the Army recorded:

... lack of knowledge about national and international issues is a chronic condition among the citizens of this country, and it does not disappear because a man changes his dungarees or his pin-stripe trousers for a khaki battledress. But if an ill-informed or indifferent citizen is a menace to our national safety, so, too, is a soldier who neither knows nor cares why he is in arms.⁴¹

Thus, from the outset the targets of current affairs teaching were citizens, not just temporary soldiers, and the purpose was to create a better informed electorate as well as a more effective fighting force.⁴²

However, before the A.B.C.A. scheme could get properly underway it faced a further hurdle. Churchill, who had apparently had his attention drawn to the potential dangers of the scheme by some Conservative M.P.s,⁴³ wrote to Margesson on 6 October expressing his fears that A.B.C.A. discussions between officers and men would undermine the Army's discipline and provide opportunities for "the professional grouser and agitator with a glib tongue."⁴⁴ Margesson replied on 8 October that although he had had initial concerns, he was satisfied that the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Summerfield, p. 143.

⁴³ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 3, *The Grand Alliance* (London: Cassell, 1950; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 739.

scheme posed no real danger. The Army Council had agreed that it was important to sustain morale and it would be closely monitored.⁴⁵ Churchill, though, remained unconvinced and wrote again to Margesson on 17 October, noting: "I hope you will wind this business up as quickly and decently as possible and set the persons concerned in it to useful work."⁴⁶ Presented with this instruction to disband A.B.C.A., Margesson passed the letter to Sir James Grigg, at this time Permanent Under-Secretary at the War Office. What transpired was related by General Adam:

Sir James Grigg sent for me and showed me the note. I was very keen on the project and knew that Sir James was in favour of it and I said 'What can we do'? Sir James opened his desk put the note at the back of a drawer and closed it and said 'I wonder if he remembers his notes.' Very few ministers would have the courage to have taken this line and it was successful.⁴⁷

Indeed, having vented his feelings Churchill promptly forgot about A.B.C.A. and turned his attention to other matters.⁴⁸

With this initial threat to the scheme thwarted, A.B.C.A. set about establishing itself under Williams and expanded its range of activities as the war went on. From the

⁴⁵ MacKenzie, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁶ Churchill, p. 742.

⁴⁷ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 2.

⁴⁸ MacKenzie, p. 101.

outset the mainstay of its effort was the production of *War* and *Current Affairs*, which were issued to officers on alternate weeks. *War* was written by two serving journalists, Captain Anthony Cotterell of the *Daily Express* and Captain Stephen Watts of the *Sunday Express*, and provided a summary of the latest military events, including items on war strategy, tactics, weapons and battle narratives.⁴⁹ *Current Affairs*, on the other hand, was written by outside civilian experts but edited in the War Office by Major Guy Chapman, a former W.E.A. tutor and editor with the publishing firm Jonathan Cape. It included analyses of both foreign and domestic affairs, and came to encompass topics that ranged from individual studies of the Allied and Axis powers to discussions of the nation's health, education and town planning. By the end of the war 118 issues had been produced.⁵⁰

To supplement these pamphlets, and influence those troops who could or would not take part in discussion, A.B.C.A. also developed a range of visual aids. During 1942 a series of travelling A.B.C.A. photographic exhibitions was organized to reinforce the themes discussed. In September 1942 an A.B.C.A. poster campaign was launched along similar lines. From November 1942 an A.B.C.A. *Map*

⁴⁹ Williams (1), p. 49; A. Cotterell, *An Apple for the Sergeant* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1944), p. 94. According to Cotterell, *War* was so named to enable the writers to answer the telephone with the words "This is War!"

⁵⁰ Williams (1), p. 49; White, pp. 97-98; Guy Chapman, *A Kind of Survivor* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975), pp. 190-191.

Review was issued to officers twice a month. Edited by Captain Lionel Birch, former assistant editor of **Picture Post**, this portrayed the outstanding events at home and abroad over each fortnight and sought to place them in a clear geographical perspective.⁵¹

Whilst A.B.C.A. devised the raw materials on which discussion could be based, it also set about the task of convincing the Army of the virtues of the scheme. From the outset General Adam and General Willans made tours of the troops to promote A.B.C.A., and Williams himself spent half his time with units, explaining its aims and methods and submitting himself to cross-examination. During 1942 a series of weekend courses and conferences on A.B.C.A. technique was organized by the A.E.C., in collaboration with C.A.C.'s Regional Committees, and A.E.C. touring teams were formed to visit units and formations to give on-the-spot instruction. In January 1943 an official A.B.C.A. school was set up at Coleg Harlech, under Lieutenant-Colonel Norman Fisher, the Assistant Education Secretary for Cambridgeshire before the war, and a more intensive five-day course developed. Of particular note was the provision of a special course at the school for commanding officers, whose cooperation was vital if the scheme was to be effective, and by the

⁵¹Williams (1), pp. 63-66; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 163-164, 166.

end of the war some 4,600 such officers had attended.^{5 2}

Indeed, a year after its introduction the military authorities seemed well pleased with the A.B.C.A. scheme's progress. Not only had it seemed to have been well received by the Army, but was regarded as having done much to sustain the morale of the troops. In August 1942 the Secretary of State, Sir James Grigg, concluded that "it is now almost universally accepted that, whenever officers have taken trouble to work it sensibly and with keenness, A.B.C.A. has been an outstanding success."^{5 3}

However, whilst the A.B.C.A. scheme was set to continue and spread to many of the overseas theatres,^{5 4} less than a year after its introduction the War Office planned a further scheme of education for the Army. By the Summer of 1942 the military situation was still depressing, with news of further defeats in the Middle East and the Far East, and it was considered that something more needed to be done if the morale of the Army was to be sustained, particularly over the long winter months ahead.^{5 5} Furthermore, it was felt that efforts should be made to

^{5 2}Williams (1), pp. 51-52, 67; Wilson, pp. 51-53; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 162, 174.

^{5 3}P. J. Grigg; preface to *The A.B.C.A. Handbook*, War Office, August 1942.

^{5 4}Williams (1), pp. 133, 158-159, 174-5, 178, 182.

^{5 5}Summerfield, p. 145.

provide some educational facilities for the 80% of troops who were unattracted by the Haining Scheme but for whom A.B.C.A. had given a taste for education.⁵⁶ Moreover, what the A.B.C.A. scheme itself revealed was just how ignorant of the country's history and institutions the average soldier was, and it was evident that some instruction in these matters was needed if current affairs discussions were to work effectively. As Williams himself noted:

The earlier experiences of A.B.C.A. brought to light what its architects had foreseen - the lamentable lack of background knowledge in the average platoon discussion. It was a common experience for discussion to peter out because there was no one present to confirm or contradict reputed matters of fact. To consolidate and reinforce the ABCA bridgehead it was necessary to devise a method of instructing the Army about the background of Current Affairs.⁵⁷

It was with these considerations in mind, as well as the need to try out educational plans in advance of the eventual demobilization of the Army,⁵⁸ that on the basis of experiments that had been carried out in Scottish and South Eastern Commands over the previous Winter, and with the consent of General Willans, a new scheme of education was drawn up by the Directorate of Education in June 1942, where F. W. D. Bendall had been replaced as Director of Education by John Burgon Bickersteth, Warden

⁵⁶ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Williams (1), p. 16.

⁵⁸ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 6.

of Hart House at the University of Toronto, head of education in the Canadian Corps, and another man regarded with suspicion by Lord Croft as having reformist sympathies.⁵⁹

On 21 July the new scheme was submitted in a paper to the E.C.A.C. by General Adam. Under the proposed scheme, which was to run in Home Commands over the Winter of 1942-43, three extra hours of compulsory education were to be held each week during training time in addition to A.B.C.A. One hour was to be devoted to subjects of a military value, a second to vocational pursuits and a third to the study of British life and government and that of the Allied nations, for which the War Office would issue a detailed syllabus. Instructors were to be found from amongst the Army's own internal resources, assisted where possible by the civilian educational organizations. Although it was acknowledged that some units, particularly training units, would be unlikely to find the extra time to conduct the classes, it was felt that the majority would be able to accommodate it. The scheme, noted Adam, would not only assist morale over the coming Winter, but would give a greater sense of purpose and direction to education in the Army and would act as a dress rehearsal for educational activities during the release period. Moreover, he added, it would encourage

⁵⁹Williams (1), p. 15; Croft, "A.B.C.A. and Political Reactions."

the keen commanding officer and enable pressure to be applied to those who were still perhaps to be convinced of the value of Army education.⁶⁰

In consideration of the new scheme on 24 June there was some hesitancy on the part of the E.C.A.C., the Quarter-Master-General, General Sir Walter Venning, doubting whether a further three hours in addition to A.B.C.A. could be applied to working units without a reduction in their output, and questioning whether the morale of field force units would actually be improved by their implementation. Adam, though, sprung to the defence of the scheme. Not only did he record that it was quite feasible for it to be modified in accordance with the special requirements of working units, but that experiments that had been carried out amongst field force units over the previous Winter had been very successful and had definitely raised the morale of the troops. In consideration of these arguments, the E.C.A.C. agreed to the scheme in principle but recommended that General Paget, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, be consulted before any further action was taken.⁶¹

In a report to the E.C.A.C. on 18 August, General Willans, who had consulted Paget over the scheme,

⁶⁰ WO 163/89, "Education in the Army during Winter 1942/1943," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)101., 21 July 1942.

⁶¹ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 69th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)30., 24 July 1942.

outlined the Commander-in-Chief's views. Paget was averse to any binding commitment on the Army and preferred that his commanders use their discretion as to how best to implement it in accordance with their own circumstances. Nevertheless, he was in favour of the scheme and attached particular importance to the hour devoted to the study of Britain and her Allies, which he considered would go far to counteract what he regarded as the tendency towards apathy in the Army.⁶² Having noted Paget's views, the E.C.A.C. gave its formal consent to the scheme on 21 August and agreed that any instructions issued on the subject should be limited to a general directive in broad terms rather than on any "sealed pattern."⁶³ On 28 August Sir James Grigg added his approval, subject to reassurances that positive action would be taken in this matter.⁶⁴

The Winter Scheme of Education, as it became known, was announced to the Army in a memorandum in September 1942. Under the scheme, which was to run from November 1942 to February 1943 and be supervised by the Directorate of Education, one period a week was to be devoted to the

⁶² WO 163/89, "Education in the Army during 1942/43," Memorandum by D.G.W.E., E.C.A.C./P(42)113., 18 August 1942.

⁶³ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 73rd Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)34., 21 August 1942.

⁶⁴ WO 163/89, Minutes of the 74th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(42)35., 28 August 1942.

education of the man as a soldier and focus on such subjects as message writing, map reading, sketching and mechanics. A second was to be devoted to the education of the man as an individual and provide time for the pursuit of hobbies or study for technical or professional qualifications. A third was to be devoted to the education of the man as a citizen and involve discussion of the British Way of Life, the British Empire and the United Nations. The material for this hour was to be provided by the Directorate in the form of a booklet, entitled *British Way and Purpose (B.W.P.)*, which was intended to offer a systematic and continuous curriculum of civic instruction against which the more random current affairs topics of A.B.C.A. could be set. Every effort was to be made to find suitable instructors for the scheme from amongst units themselves, but arrangements were put in hand for C.A.C.'s Regional Committees and the A.E.C, which had been growing in strength, to assist where required.⁶⁵

The Winter Scheme, and the hour devoted to the study of *B.W.P.* in particular, marked another important military development. Not only did it extend the principle of compulsory education in the wartime Army, and reinforce the notion of the soldier as a thinking being with

⁶⁵ WO 32/10455, "The Winter Scheme of Education," Memorandum by D.A.E., issued with War Office letter to General Officers Commanding-in-Chief, All Home Commands, 7 September 1942; Williams (1), p. 16.

interests in the world around him, but it signified a further shift in the direction of Army education. Whilst the overriding aim of **B.W.P.** was still to sustain the morale and fighting efficiency of the troops by clarifying the objectives of the war, by focusing on aspects of Britain worth fighting for, rather than current affairs, the declared intention of **B.W.P.**, even more than A.B.C.A., was to inspire in the troops a more enlightened form of citizenship and a more responsible participation in the democratic process. As the memorandum announcing the scheme to the Army stressed:

These talks should have the vitally important aim of driving home what we and our Allies are fighting for, as well as our responsibilities as citizens of a democratic country and as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.⁶⁶

In November 1942 the Winter Scheme got underway and the **B.W.P.** hour soon established itself as its most prominent and distinctive element. The **B.W.P.** booklets were issued to units once a month and included four chapters as the basis for each week's discussion. Written by outside experts, but edited in the War Office by Major R. L. Marshall of the A.E.C., they dealt with such topics as British democratic, social and economic institutions, the growth and organization of the British Empire and Britain's relationship with her Allies.⁶⁷ In order to

⁶⁶ WO 32/10455, "The Winter Scheme of Education."

⁶⁷ White, p. 102; Hawkins and Brimble, p. 139; Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 6.

assist unit instructors in the conduct of the *B.W.P* classes, C.A.C.'s Regional Committees organized a series of short courses on the subject matter and methods required, and the A.E.C provided touring teams to give on-the-spot advice. However, since a number of units had difficulty in procuring their own instructors, and because of the complexity of some of the topics discussed, a good deal of the teaching was done either by panels of C.A.C. lecturers or A.E.C. personnel themselves, who became involved in a comprehensive instructional effort for the first time.⁶⁸

By the close of 1942 the military authorities were sufficiently pleased with the progress of the *B.W.P.* hour, in terms of the reception it seemed to have had from the Army and its stimulating effect on the morale of the troops, for General Adam to propose that it, along with its accompanying booklets, should be continued into the Summer of 1943 after the other two hours of the Winter Scheme finished in February.⁶⁹ This was agreed by Grigg, subject to the provisos that care would be taken to avoid any political or propagandist tendencies in the subjects covered and that Lord Croft should watch over

⁶⁸Williams (1), p. 17; Wilson, pp. 58, 60-65; Adam VIII, chap. 8, pp. 6-7;

⁶⁹WO 163/89, "Education in the Army during the Winter 1942/43," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(42)161., 28 December 1942.

its development.⁷⁰ The extension was announced to the Army in March 1943,⁷¹ General Paget going as far as issuing a special letter on the subject in which he stressed the importance he attached to *B.W.P.* as "a means of developing a sense of citizenship in the Army which will pay a high dividend after the war."⁷²

By the Summer of 1943, then, three educational schemes were operating concurrently in the Army: the voluntary Haining Scheme and the compulsory A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* hours. However, it was during this period that A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* came under challenge from some elements in the War Office and beyond. During the first year of A.B.C.A.'s existence, Williams had been careful to avoid controversy in the topics addressed by *Current Affairs* and Lord Croft pronounced himself completely satisfied with the early issues, which he considered to be educative, informative and free from political bias.⁷³ From the Summer of 1942, though, Williams had begun to turn his attention towards post-war domestic issues and Croft, a Conservative of the most orthodox views, became uneasy over what he regarded as the leftist bias which

⁷⁰ WO 32/10455, Note by P.J.G., 30 January 1943; WO 163/90, Minutes of the 96th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(43)6., 5 February 1943.

⁷¹ WO 32/10455, "Army Education," Army Council Instruction 352, 3 March 1943.

⁷² WO 32/10455, letter from B. C. T. Paget to All Army Commanders, and G.O.C., London District, 27 March 1943.

⁷³ Croft, "Welfare and Education. A.B.C.A."

Current Affairs seemed to be embodying.⁷⁴

Indeed, whilst Sir James Grigg was averse to tying down A.B.C.A. too much in the material it was producing,⁷⁵ he was compelled to take some action over one issue of *Current Affairs* at the end of 1942. During the course of that year Sir William Beveridge had been preparing his report for the government on the social services, and when it was published on 4 December it was hailed as the blueprint for the building of the post-war welfare state and assumed to indicate the future trend of government social policy. Williams was anxious that the troops should have an opportunity to discuss the report and Beveridge agreed to write a summary for *Current Affairs*, which was issued on 19 December.⁷⁶ Before he set off on an overseas tour at the end of the year, General Adam had looked over the draft, which he considered unexceptional, but had suggested that Williams show it to Grigg before it was issued in case of political difficulties.⁷⁷ Yet for some reason this was not done and when Grigg saw a copy he was alarmed since the recommendations of the Beveridge Report had met with the disapproval of a number of senior Conservative Ministers and had not received

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ WO 163/51, Minutes of the 19th Meeting of the Army Council, A.C./M(42)8., 11 December 1942.

⁷⁶ MacKenzie, pp. 133-134.

⁷⁷ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 2.

official sanction. In these circumstances, and in order to avoid A.B.C.A. becoming embroiled in political controversy, on 21 December he ordered the immediate withdrawal of the issue from circulation; a decision that created a storm of protest in the press and parliament over the War Office's suppression of discussion on an issue of great topicality and importance to the troops.⁷⁸

Grigg was forced to take some further action in relation to A.B.C.A. in the Spring of 1943. During the previous Autumn, Williams had launched an A.B.C.A. poster campaign under the title of "Your Britain - Fight For It Now." The posters, which were the work of Captain Abram Games, an award-winning designer who had worked for the London County Council before the war, and Frank Newbould, a designer for the G.P.O. and the Great Western Railway, included portrayals of romantic landscapes and village scenes, but a number were intended to reinforce the reconstructionist themes increasingly being discussed in *Current Affairs*.⁷⁹ One such poster by Games depicted a pre-war boy with rickets standing amid scenes of poverty

⁷⁸ MacKenzie, p. 134; Henry Page Croft, *My Life of Strife* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1948), pp. 324-325; *Parliamentary Debates* (Commons), 5th series, vol. 386 (1942-43), cols. 10-14; "Notes of the Week," *The Economist* 143 (January 1943), p. 797; J. Mackay-Mure, "The Soldier as Citizen," *The Spectator* 170 (January 1943), p. 27; J. L. Stocks, "Notes and Comments," *The Highway* 35 (February 1943), p. 64.

⁷⁹ MacKenzie, p. 140; Joseph Darracott and Belinda Loftus, *Second World War Posters* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1972), pp. 30-31, 46.

and neglect, and superimposed on this was a modern new health centre symbolising the importance of preventative health care in post-war Britain.⁸⁰ This poster was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister by the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, who thought it would serve to reduce morale rather than improve it.⁸¹ Churchill, who had been hostile to A.B.C.A. from the outset, agreed and wrote to Grigg on the matter on 17 April:

The poster is a disgraceful libel on the conditions prevailing in Great Britain before the war. With all our shortcomings, conditions in this country were a model to Europe and to many parts of the United States. It is a very wrong thing that the War Office should be responsible for such exaggerated and distorted propaganda. The soldiers know their homes are not like that.⁸²

In his reply, Grigg noted that although the picture of disease was not intended to represent the soldier's home, and the health centre with which it was contrasted did actually exist, the poster would, nevertheless, not be issued.⁸³ This, though, failed to satisfy Churchill and in June he instructed the Lord President of the Council, Sir John Anderson, to investigate A.B.C.A.'s

⁸⁰ Darracott and Loftus, pp. 30-31.

⁸¹ MacKenzie, pp. 140-141.

⁸² WO 259/77, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, Serial No. M.278/3., 17 April 1943.

⁸³ WO 259/77, P.J.G. to P.M., 21 April 1943.

activities.⁸⁴ In July Anderson submitted his report but found little to concern him. Indeed, he recorded:

My general impression of A.B.C.A. is that it has proved a most successful experiment, that the Army Council is to be congratulated on having decided to launch it in spite of the possible dangers; and that those responsible for this organization have shown both initiative and restraint.⁸⁵

In the light of these findings, Churchill took no further action but wrote to Anderson that every effort had to be made to ensure that extra time, money and personnel were not absorbed into these activities.⁸⁶

However, whilst A.B.C.A. was becoming an increasing source of controversy, so the *B.W.P.* booklets also came to be seen by Lord Croft as embodying the same leftist tendencies, and by the Summer of 1943 he had become sufficiently concerned to draw up a detailed memorandum for Grigg in which he outlined his views:

When we first discussed the promotion of talks on current affairs our main aim was to create an interest amongst all serving soldiers in the course of this war; knowledge of the Dominions, India and the Colonies and a broad outline of British citizenship, the constitution and methods of government and administration.

Since that time discussions on material provided by A.B.C.A. and to some extent by

⁸⁴ MacKenzie, p. 141.

⁸⁵ Anderson to Churchill, 30 July 1943; quoted in MacKenzie, p. 142.

⁸⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 5, *Closing the Ring* (London: Cassell, 1952; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 581.

British Way and Purpose, on all home affairs have tended all the time in the following directions:-

a) the promotion of criticism upon financial, economic and social structure existing in this country at the outbreak of war.

b) the suggestion that all soldiers should regard material considerations as they concern themselves as the most important factor in life.

c) the suggestion that the pre-war way of life must never be consented to and that something better is coming.

d) that the old kind of job in which the man was serving is possibly inadequate and unsuitable and not one to which he would wish to go back to.

Whereas these efforts to promote critical discussion upon the Government of Great Britain can none of them be described as openly vicious, the cumulative effect must tend towards revolutionary ideas, and what is equally undesirable a grave sense of disillusion, heart-burning and anger if and when it is found that the State is not able to implement all the promised boons that the soldiers are encouraged to demand as a right.

I cannot think that the stimulation of this form of criticism is the duty of the War Office....

Both D.A.E. and D.A.B.C.A. in spite I have no doubt of their desire to be impartial and carry out the spirit of their instructions, are both ardent Left Wingers and give me the impression of feeling that their task is to make the Army political minded with very strong leanings towards State control and complete Beveridgising the British citizen.

This tendency is aggravated by the fact that the A.E.C. Corps are not free from similar ideas and the Council of Adult Education, which provides the bulk of the civilian lecturers is also Left Wing in outlook and particularly International.

All this may no doubt stimulate interest in soldiers' discussions, but appears to me to be quite outside, and I should have thought hostile to Army policy, which I have always felt should be kept absolutely free from political bias or political opinion....

I most strongly recommend that someone with no political prejudice but with a real knowledge of affairs should be put in charge of both these Directorates as Director General.

If an educationalist can be discovered who is not Left Wing it would be desirable, but rather than risk a continuance of Army education still being used as a propaganda medium, I think the Director General should not be chosen from that

fraternity but should be an outstanding personality who will insist on training our men for the battle of life rather than the battle of politics.⁸⁷

To illustrate his case Croft appended a detailed critique of a July 1943 edition of *Current Affairs*, entitled "When the Lights Go On," which he regarded as typical of the trend of educational material being produced. Analysing it paragraph by paragraph, he argued that its tendency from start to finish was to imply that British citizens had been badly treated before the war, and that the government should assume a greater responsibility for providing for them during the post-war years. Indeed, he concluded:

If every officer is teaching his men on these lines week after week, what may we well ask are we going to do when the Army through its official machinery has built up a divine discontent which no power on earth can appease?⁸⁸

Grigg's natural tendency was to defend Army education when he could. Yet as his withdrawal of the pamphlet on the Beveridge Report demonstrated, he was aware of the need to avoid political bias. It might, therefore, have been thought that Croft's memorandum would have struck a chord with him. That it did not was no doubt partly due to the rather sweeping criticisms and recommendations it made, but perhaps more importantly to the fact that

⁸⁷ Croft, "A.B.C.A. and Political Reactions."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Williams had taken the precaution of showing a copy of "When the Lights Go On" to Grigg before publication, who, along with two other members of the Cabinet, had given it his unconditional blessing. Croft's memorandum thus had no impact on educational policy and he was destined to remain merely a suspicious observer for the rest of the war.⁸⁹

However, whilst A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* came under attack on political grounds, they also came under fire on financial ones. By the Summer of 1943 Sir Eric Speed, the Permanent Under-Secretary (Finance), had become concerned at the growing costs of education and requested that the subject be brought to the attention of the E.C.A.C.⁹⁰ In discussion of this matter in September, Speed recorded that the basis of wartime educational policy had been laid down by the Haining Committee in 1940, which had envisaged a voluntary scheme with the intention of improving the soldiers' morale and military efficiency. Since that time, he argued, Army education had vastly exceeded its remit and through A.B.C.A. discussions and the *B.W.P.* hour had moved to a largely compulsory phenomenon whose purpose was no longer concerned with wartime requirements, but with the wider needs of the

⁸⁹ MacKenzie, p. 161.

⁹⁰ WO 32/10462, P.U.S.(F) to A.G., 12 August 1943.

post-war world.⁹¹ This he considered both unnecessary and costly and put forward the view that it was "not a proper charge upon the Army Votes to educate the Army beyond the standard requisite for its success as a military machine."⁹²

General Adam, who had taken over day-to-day responsibility for educational affairs on the death of General Willans earlier in the year,⁹³ mounted a vigorous defence of Army education. Primarily, he argued, the Army Council had, by its very acceptance of A.B.C.A. and the B.W.P. hour, fully endorsed the educational developments that had taken place, and all the evidence he had indicated that these schemes were popular in the Army and had done much to sustain and improve the morale of the troops. Furthermore, he noted, the Army needed to look ahead to the demobilization period and build on the existing educational activities, and it was imperative that adequate foundations were laid before that time. The costs of Army education, he continued, could hardly be said to be extravagant, amounting as they did annually to no more than the equivalent of thirty-five tanks or twenty bombers which could be lost in a single night, and

⁹¹WO 163/92, Minutes of the 127th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council, E.C.A.C./M(43)37., 10 September 1943.

⁹²WO 163/92, "Army Education," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(43)98., 3 September 1943.

⁹³White, p. 88.

he called upon the E.C.A.C. to confirm that the policies adopted would continue to be the right ones.⁹⁴ Indeed, he added his own personal commitment to the cause of Army education, recording: "I most strongly deprecate any reduction in the increasing volume of its activities or any attempt to narrow its scope."⁹⁵

In consideration of these arguments, Sir Frederick Bovenschen, the Permanent Under-Secretary, voiced his concern that some of the older soldiers might come to resent too much compulsory education. However, with the backing of the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Nye, who considered that since the Army had taken many millions of men away from their civilian studies so it had an obligation to educate them for their subsequent return to civil life, Adam's views prevailed and the E.C.A.C. agreed that no impediment should be put in the way of the continuation of Army education along the current lines.⁹⁶

Having survived these challenges, Army education continued to build on its achievements as the war went on. Whilst the Haining Scheme was set to continue and expand its activities, with some 100,000 lectures, short courses and classes being arranged for the troops by

⁹⁴ WO 163/92, E.C.A.C./P(43)98; WO 163/92, E.C.A.C./M(43)37.

⁹⁵ WO 163/92, E.C.A.C./P(43)98.

⁹⁶ WO 163/92, E.C.A.C./M(43)37.

C.A.C.'s Regional Committees over the six months ending March 1944,⁹⁷ the decision was taken to repeat the complete Winter Scheme of Education over the Winter of 1943-44, and to carry on the *B.W.P.* hour without limit.⁹⁸ Although the accompanying booklets eventually came to an end in May 1944, when the eighteen monthly issues that had been produced were consolidated into a single volume,⁹⁹ the *B.W.P.* hour was destined to remain a part of the training programme at home for the rest of the war and be adopted in a modified form in overseas commands.¹⁰⁰

The A.B.C.A. hour also continued to seek to consolidate its place in Army life, and A.B.C.A. added a further innovative dimension to its range of teaching aids with the dramatization of current affairs. Early in 1943 Williams was visiting an A.B.C.A. training course organized by Michael MacOwan, an Education Officer with London District Anti-Aircraft, who had run the Westminster Theatre before the war. Williams, who had patronized the theatre, approached MacOwan with the idea of producing A.B.C.A. plays and he agreed to cooperate. MacOwan had in mind the creation of something along the

⁹⁷Wilson, p. 173.

⁹⁸WO 163/92, "Education in the Army during the Winter 1943/44," Memorandum by A.G., E.C.A.C./P(43)99., 6 September 1943; WO 163/92, E.C.A.C./M(43)37.

⁹⁹Hawkins and Brimble, p. 140.

¹⁰⁰Williams (1), pp. 17, 133, 174-5.

lines of the American Federal Theatre's experimental *Living Newspapers* productions of the 1930s, which utilized a range of theatrical techniques to explore topical issues of the day, and he recruited Stephen Murray of the London District Theatre Unit to assist him.¹⁰¹ Murray produced a short piece in this style on the League of Nations, entitled *United We Stand*, and performed it during the weekly A.B.C.A. hour at several gun sites. General Adam was invited to attend one of the performances and was so impressed that at the end of 1943 an A.B.C.A. Play Unit was set up under MacOwan to tour productions around the troops, and the bulk of Murray's London District Theatre Unit was eventually absorbed into it.¹⁰²

The first play performed by this new department was J. B. Priestley's *Desert Highway*, a study of anti-semitism written especially for the Army. The rest of the productions, though, were written by the Unit itself. The writing was done on a committee basis by MacOwan together with Bridget Boland, a film writer serving in the A.T.S., Ted Willis, a civilian who had written plays for the amateur Unity Theatre before the war, and Jack Lindsay, an Australian author and poet in the Royal Signals. At

¹⁰¹ see chap. 6, pp. 178-79.

¹⁰² Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh. Entertaining the British and American Forces 1939-1946* (London: MacDonald & Jane's, 1978), pp. 103-105.

script meetings all four would act out allotted political roles, MacOwan the Liberal, Boland the Conservative, Willis the Socialist and Lindsay the Communist, with the intention of developing thought-provoking material.¹⁰³ As Boland records:

We could have handled the material very carefully, not offending anyone, but we thought that would be a bore. The whole point of A.B.C.A. was to start discussions, to start the soldier thinking for himself. After the play we wanted them to go away and talk - and if we didn't start an argument *they* weren't going to. We worked on the principle that if it doesn't annoy somebody, it's a bore, cut it out. Find something that is going to annoy somebody, the object being to annoy everybody equally.¹⁰⁴

The first of the Unit's plays, which came to encompass a range of dramatic techniques that included factual episodes, fantasy, poetry, cross-cutting between time and place, sound and lighting effects and audience participation, was performed in the Summer of 1944 and entitled *Whats Wrong With The Germans?*, a portrait of life under a Nazi police state. This was followed by *The Great Swop*, a discussion of the principles and workings of Lend-Lease, and *The Japanese Way*, a study of the indoctrination of a Japanese soldier. The final wartime production was performed in the Spring of 1945 and entitled *Where Do We Go From Here?* It told the controversial story of a Tyneside family between the wars

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ quoted in Fawkes, p. 106.

and dealt with the issues of welfare provision and post-war planning.¹⁰⁵ Adam was a little nervous of the political reactions to this play, but Lady Grigg came to the dress rehearsal on her husband's behalf, gave it her consent, and the press notices were entirely favourable.¹⁰⁶

Whilst the Haining Scheme and the A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* hours were the major educational initiatives of the war, in that they were expected to be applied to troops across the country, it was notable that the military authorities did not ignore the special educational needs of particular categories of soldiers. One such category were those in military hospitals or convalescent depots whose mental and physical recovery it was thought would be greatly assisted by the provision of educational facilities. To this end, an A.E.C. instructor was appointed to every medical establishment of over 300 beds and, in association with Army psychiatrists, developed a range of educational activities for the patients. These included the pursuit of hobby interests, more formal academic lectures and classes, and A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* type discussions which were considered to be particularly useful as a remedial aid to neurosis cases.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 105-108.

¹⁰⁶ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Williams (1), pp. 80-83; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 128-131; White, pp. 115-116.

Another such category were soldiers in military prisons or detention barracks whom it was felt might benefit from educational provision as a means of reforming their characters. An A.E.C. instructor was thus appointed to every 200 prisoners in these corrective establishments and, together with Army psychiatrists, set to organizing a range of educational activities for the prisoners. In 1943 an official syllabus was issued for these institutions which laid down at least three periods a week of education, of which one was to be devoted to individual interests such as music, art and drama, and the others to A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* discussions which were considered to be particularly beneficial in enabling soldiers to shed the anti-social attitudes many of them displayed.¹⁰⁸

A further category that received particular attention were illiterates, who by the very nature of their disadvantage were unlikely ever to become fully militarily efficient because they were unable to read orders or instructions, and whose morale was perpetually low through the sense of shame and inferiority many of them carried. From 1940 some efforts were made by individual commands to provide educational facilities for the 1% of recruits that were regarded as illiterate. In 1943, though, a special drive was launched to eradicate

¹⁰⁸Williams (1), pp. 83-85; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 407-408; White, pp. 116-118.

the problem and a network of Basic Education Centres (B.E.C.s) was set up around the country, in the interests, it was recorded, "both of the Army and of the Nation." The B.E.C.s, which were staffed by A.E.C. personnel and run in cooperation with Army psychiatrists and Personnel Selection Officers at the Primary Training Centres, provided an intensive six to eight-week course of reading and writing on the basis of a special booklet, drawn up in consultation with civilian experts, entitled *English Parade*. However, they also included a range of other activities, such as physical training, handicrafts, nature study and A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* discussions, which it was considered added variety to the course and contributed to the illiterate's sense of confidence and achievement, so aiding his study of the written word. By the Spring of 1945 eleven B.E.C.s were in operation, which between them had provided for some 7,000 soldiers, and the results revealed that the reading and spelling ages of the soldiers involved improved on average by approximately two years over the course.¹⁰⁹

During the course of the war, then, the military authorities instituted a formidable array of educational provision for the troops, and there has been much debate on its impact. Certainly, whilst the voluntary Haining

¹⁰⁹Williams (1), pp. 76-80; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 227-230; White, pp. 112-114; R. C. Shawyer, "The Army Fights Illiteracy," *Adult Education* 17 (December 1944), pp. 76-82.

Scheme was to remain largely marginal to the life of the average soldier,¹¹⁰ there was a good deal of evidence to suggest that the compulsory A.B.C.A and B.W.P. hours made an important contribution towards sustaining and improving the morale of the troops. Army morale reports consistently referred to the good effect these discussions were having in counteracting soldiers' ignorance and restoring their faith in the war effort.¹¹¹ In fact, one such report noted in 1943:

Commanders are generally agreed that interest in them is increasing, that they are appreciated by the troops and that they are (in the words of an Army Commander) 'a necessary part, in the broadest sense, of the armoury of the efficient soldier.'¹¹²

Moreover, in a wider context, it has been argued that these discussions did much to create a keener sense of citizenship amongst the troops by not only instilling in them the values of rational argument and critical judgement, but by providing them with a heightened socio-political awareness. As Basil Yeaxlee, Secretary of C.A.C., observed in 1944:

¹¹⁰ MacKenzie, p. 178.

¹¹¹ WO 163/88, Morale Report, January 1942, issued with E.C.A.C./P(42)37., 1 April 1942; WO 163/161, Morale Report, August-October 1942, M.C./P(42)3., 15 December 1942; WO 163/52, Morale Report, November 1942-January 1943, A.C./G(43)10., 7 April 1943; WO 163/52, Morale Report, May-July 1943, A.C./G(43)27., 5 October 1943.

¹¹² WO 163/53, Morale Report, August-October 1943, A.C./G(44)4., 11 January 1944.

There is a new political consciousness, quickened by knowledge, so greatly lacking before, of how our local and national government works, of our Commonwealth relationships and international problems. This induces a greater sense of personal responsibility. Scores of thousands of young adults who have never cast a vote or participated in an election have now begun to realise that if the mass of the people take no interest and no action they, in effect, consent to the rule of the minority.¹¹³

Indeed, in Croftian fashion, these discussions, and the material on which they were based, were accused by some elements in the Conservative Party of turning soldiers politically leftwards and being in some way responsible for the loss of the 1945 General Election. "The Forces vote in particular," contended R. A. Butler, "had been virtually won over by the left-wing influence of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs."¹¹⁴

In any assessment of these arguments, it is first necessary to establish whether these discussions ever actually took place on any effective scale in the Army. Although official estimates suggested that by 1943 A.B.C.A. and **B.W.P.** discussions were being carried out successfully in some 60% of units at home,¹¹⁵ it was clear that in a good many units they never got off the ground. In the case of A.B.C.A., not only was it evident

¹¹³ Basil Yeaxlee, "Army Education," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 92 (June 1944), p. 365.

¹¹⁴ R. A. Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), p. 129.

¹¹⁵ WO 163/53, Appendix "B" to A.C./G(44)4; Williams (1), p. 18.

that a number of junior officers either regarded the scheme as a further unwelcome chore, or were afraid that their ignorance might be shown up in discussions with their men,¹¹⁶ but a good many commanding officers, upon whom the success of the scheme ultimately depended, either saw it as having little relevance to military training or as positively seditious, and failed to ensure that it was properly carried out.¹¹⁷ As one Army lecturer observed in 1943:

The Army Bureau of Current Affairs (A.B.C.A.) provides a sufficient proof that commanding officers can, and in some cases do, disregard instructions, at least where education is concerned. When the Bureau was established, over twelve months ago, an Army Council Instruction was issued that henceforward in all units regular weekly talks on current affairs, based on pamphlets issued by the Bureau, were to be given by regimental officers; but even at this date no one knowing the facts pretends that the Instruction is everywhere being faithfully observed, or denies that in a considerable number of units no attempt whatever is made to implement

¹¹⁶ Michael Joseph, *The Sword in the Scabbard* (London: Michael Joseph, 1942), p. 223; M.O.-A., FR 948, 3 November 1941; White, p. 100; Rev. D. D. Caldwell, letter to the author, November 1988; Maj. F. C. McMahon (ret'd), letter to the author, October 1988; Lt.-Col. W. R. H. Charley (ret'd), letter to the author, January 1989.

¹¹⁷ White, pp. 99-100; Lloyd, p. 19; Hawkins and Brimble, pp. 297-298; M.O.-A., FR 948; M.O.-A., FR 1485, 12 November 1942; "Notes of the Week," *The Economist* 141 (December 1941), p. 738; Major Bonamy Dobree, "A.B.C.A. Gets Going," *The Spectator* 168 (January 1942), p. 55; "A Frustrated Army," *The Tribune*, no. 271 (1942), p. 10; WO 32/9735, letter from S. of S. to Sir Stafford Cripps, September 1942; Adam V/5, letter from A.G. to Corps District, Divisional, A.A. Group, District and Area Commanders, September 1943; WO 277/16, "Morale," War Office Monograph compiled by Lt.-Col. J. H. A. Sparrow, 1949, p. 18.

it.¹¹⁸

This was a view confirmed by many serving in the Army.

One soldier noted in the Spring of 1942:

The A.B.C.A. scheme remains a dead letter, more often than not, not because it would be impossible to spare one period a week, but because these talks just don't fit into the general scheme of things.¹¹⁹

Another reported at the end of 1942:

If any time has to be cut from the programme one of the first casualties is the talk on 'Current Affairs.' In fact, there have been scarcely veiled indications from junior officers that 'Current Affairs' and all talks on similar subjects are to be avoided whenever possible. Time that might otherwise have been devoted to the subject is frequently occupied by extending a routine parade with little or no training value.¹²⁰

William Shebbeare concluded in 1944:

... most units do not take it very seriously. If the programme gets very full - as it almost always does - then the first thing to get left out is A.B.C.A. A period of A.B.C.A. may appear in the training programme week after week and yet never take place at all. It is always being cancelled at the last minute.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ S. G. Raybould, "The Commanding Officer and Army Education," *The Highway* 35 (November 1942), p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Another Private Soldier, letter to the Editor, *The Spectator* 168 (April 1942), p. 377.

¹²⁰ WO 163/161, "Army Morale and Efficiency," Essay by a Private in the Black Watch, December 1942, Appendix "A" to M.C./P(43)1., 1 March 1943.

¹²¹ Captain X, p. 66.

Indeed, if one applies this picture of indifference on the part of commanding officers to *B.W.P.* discussions as well, and given the fact that since there was always a shortage of competent unit instructors to conduct these classes, and the manpower resources of C.A.C. and the A.E.C., which only came to number some 2,000 serving personnel across the entire Army, were strictly limited, so they were by their very nature more difficult to implement, then it does seem that the situation was at best patchy. One unofficial estimate in 1943 put the number of units that were successfully carrying out A.B.C.A. and *B.W.P.* discussions as low as 10%.¹²²

However, even if these discussions were implemented with full effect across most units, questions have to be raised about whether they had quite the impact on the troops that was claimed for them. Primarily, whilst a number of soldiers may have benefitted from the discussion periods and been given new insights into the world around them, it seems doubtful that they created in the mass of the troops some burning new sense of citizenship or political consciousness. Not only was it evident that many men regarded them with a good deal of

¹²² A Correspondent, "Army Education," *The Journal of Education* 75 (December 1943), p. 549; Williams (1), p. 197; Ross, pp. 24-25.

apathy or cynicism,¹²³ but censors' reports of soldiers' letters in the latter years of the war indicated that they played no great part in their daily thoughts or lives.¹²⁴ In fact, *The Economist* went as far as to conclude in 1943 that:

The temptation to see army education through somewhat romantic glasses is too seldom resisted. The picture of a great civilian army pulsing with interest and information on world affairs and civic problems is almost entirely a well-meaning myth. The mass of soldiers, like the mass of civilians, is mostly unmoved and unaffected by matters outside daily work.¹²⁵

Similarly, even if a number of soldiers were influenced by these discussions, it is difficult to see them as being directly responsible for the troops voting Labour or for the outcome of the general election. In the first instance, whilst the majority of soldiers undoubtedly supported Labour, only a minority actually voted and research has shown that their votes did not have a

¹²³ M.O.-A., FR 948; Infantry Subaltern, Home Forces, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 25 (April 1943), pp. 256-257; Cadet, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 26 (July 1943), p. 72; Lt.-Col. R.A.O.C., letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 29 (February 1945), p. 108; William P. Wylie, letter to the Editor, *The Spectator* 173 (December 1944), p. 599; Another Captain, letter to the Editor, *The Spectator* 174 (January 1945), p. 12; Gary Allighan, "Who Obstructs the Soldiers' Vote?," *The Tribune*, no. 392 (1944), pp. 11-12; Signalman Smith, letter to the Editor, *The Tribune*, no. 399 (1944), p. 13; L.-Cpl. F. G. G. Hunt, "A.B.C.A. Alone Won't Do," *The Tribune*, no. 420 (1945), p. 10.

¹²⁴ WO 163/53, A.C./G(44)4; WO 163/53, Morale Report, November 1943-January 1944, A.C./G(44)22., 23 May 1944; WO 163/54, Morale Report, November 1944-January 1945, A.C./G(45)12., 4 July 1945.

¹²⁵ "Notes of the Week," *The Economist* 145 (December 1943), p. 809.

significant impact on the overall result.¹²⁶ Furthermore, although some of the educational material was mildly reformist at times, it was heavily edited in the War Office and often by relevant government ministries, and most observers agree that it was largely uncontroversial in nature.¹²⁷ Moreover, even if the course of these discussions drifted to the Left, they generally took place against certain inbuilt constraints. As one soldier observed in 1945:

... all Army education is based on the notion that the Army has to remain a politically neutral body. This so-called political neutrality is the real stumbling block which makes the development of the Army as a progressive and clear-thinking political force so immensely difficult. All Army education, lectures and discussions are based on the alleged eternity and sacredness of our present social system.¹²⁸

Indeed, the very fact that the bulk of the civilian population voted Labour without having had the benefit of these discussions suggests that the critics of Army education, along with those of Army newspapers and libraries, should have looked more to the spirit of the age and the circumstances of Army life to explain why

¹²⁶ Summerfield, p. 133.

¹²⁷ Col. A. White, letter to the Editor, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 4 October 1970, p. 25; Chapman, p. 191; Summerfield, pp. 146-149; Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945. British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), pp. 148-149; Angus Calder, *The People's War. Britain 1939-45* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 252.

¹²⁸ A Serving Soldier, "The Inarticulate Revolution," *The Tribune*, no. 376 (1944), p. 11.

soldiers voted the way they did.¹²⁹ Certainly, General Adam regarded the accusations of political bias as "absurd",¹³⁰ and Williams himself consistently denied them. Responding to the charge, some twenty-five years after the event, that he had helped deliver votes to the Labour Party, he noted:

If it were true, Attlee's government proved very ungrateful, for one of its immediate economies was to dismantle the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. I suppose I was lucky to escape the tower.¹³¹

What the true impact these discussions had on the troops it is perhaps almost impossible to assess. Where their value possibly lay in military terms, though, was in the change in routine they afforded to the soldiers, the chance of a quiet cigarette, and as a safety-valve for their frustrations. As one former soldier recalls:

A.B.C.A. and B.W.P. were a break in the training routine where soldiers could smoke and dream whilst somebody else stood up and aired extremist political views. If these appeared to embarrass the officer then everybody agreed with them for the hell of it.¹³²

From as early as 1942 the military authorities began to plan educational provision for the demobilization period,

¹²⁹ MacKenzie, p. 186.

¹³⁰ Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 5.

¹³¹ W. E. Williams, letter to the Editor, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 11 October 1970, p. 12.

¹³² Peter Harris, letter to the author, January 1988.

and in July 1945 introduced an Army Education (Release Period) Scheme under the direction of Philip Morris, the Director for Education in Kent. Building on wartime educational developments and designed to assist soldiers in their return to civil life, this was to include six hours of compulsory education a week on a range of non-military subjects, of which two were to be devoted to A.B.C.A. and B.W.P. Classes were to be conducted by unit personnel, with additional assistance from C.A.C.'s Regional Committees where required, and the A.E.C. was to coordinate the effort.¹³³ Of note also was the influence exerted on the BBC by Morris and General Adam to provide a series of Forces educational broadcasts for the troops. These, it was contended, would not only assist the scheme but would allow the BBC to experiment in the use of educational broadcasting techniques for post-war civilians.¹³⁴

The Release Scheme was to prove less successful than was hoped. Not only did the sudden end of the Japanese War throw the plan out of step, since it was envisaged that a period of a year would elapse between V.E. and V.J. Days during which time it would have had a chance to build up steadily and progressively, but it suffered from shortages of educational materials and instructors, and

¹³³Williams (1), pp. 18-26.

¹³⁴Adam VIII, chap. 8, p. 12.

lack of cooperation on the part of some commanding officers.¹³⁵ By early 1946 it was admitted that "in some commands, the implementation of the scheme has fallen far short of what had been hoped."¹³⁶

Whilst the Release Scheme was underway, however, the planning of educational provision for the post-war Army proceeded and, conscious of the need to make adequate arrangements for the new generation of national servicemen, a new peacetime Scheme of Education was announced in 1947. Drawing on wartime experience, it included three hours a week of compulsory education in non-military subjects, of which one hour was to be devoted to citizenship on the basis of the *B.W.P.* consolidated volume, and one to current affairs discussions using material provided by the new civilian Bureau of Current Affairs, which had been founded by W. E. Williams when he left the War Office in 1945. The bulk of the teaching was to be done by the R.A.E.C.,¹³⁷ but the current affairs discussions were to be conducted as before by regimental officers, and links were to be

¹³⁵ Williams (1), pp. 111-123; Signalman, letter to the Editor, *The New Statesman and Nation* 30 (October 1945), p. 230; Peter Rees, *Home-Coming Heroes. An Account of the Re-Assimilation of British Military Personnel into Civilian Life* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), p. 195.

¹³⁶ WO 32/15572, Morale Reports, Army at Home, November 1945-January 1946, Army Overseas, December 1945-February 1946; quoted in R. Pope, "The Planning and Implementation of British Demobilisation 1941-6," (Ph.D. thesis, Open University, 1985), p. 291.

¹³⁷ rechristened the Royal Army Educational Corps in 1946.

maintained with the civilian educational organizations through a new Army Education Advisory Board.¹³⁸

It was, though, perhaps indicative of the antipathy towards education that continued to be held in some quarters in the Army that the peacetime scheme as it stood did not last long into the post-war era. Faced with a lack of cooperation from commanding officers, who complained that it had little intrinsic value to the soldier and that it merely served to interfere with their more important tasks,¹³⁹ not only was the decision taken in the late 1940s to abolish set weekly hours for education and reintroduce the old examination system for Army Certificates of Education, but also to tailor the syllabus more to the needs of military training and phase out discussion of domestic political issues in citizenship and current affairs periods, devoting them instead to Army related subjects.¹⁴⁰ In many ways the wartime experiment had come to an end.

During the course of the war the military authorities made significant changes both in terms of the scale and content of educational provision for the Army. Whilst education in the pre-war Regular Army had been largely

¹³⁸ MacKenzie, pp. 192-3, 213-217; White, pp. 180-181.

¹³⁹ WO 163/497, First Report. Army Working Day Investigating Team, 22 July 1948; WO 163/497, Second Report. Army Working Day Investigating Team, 17 October 1948; WO 163/317, Army Manpower Committee. Final Report (First Draft), 10 November 1948.

¹⁴⁰ White, pp. 184-185; MacKenzie, pp. 219-220.

reduced to elementary instruction in military related subjects, to which a soldier's chances of earning a little extra pay were attached, the War Office instituted a vast adult education programme for the wartime Army, operating on a scale probably unprecedented in British history, and training a generation of servicemen in the values of responsible citizenship. It was, in the words of General Adam, "a great manifestation of democratic faith."¹⁴¹ Indeed, what the experience of war seemed to illustrate was that the modern soldier would no longer be motivated into effective military performance purely by appeals to duty or the stirring up of patriotism or revenge, but as an intelligent being he needed to be persuaded of the positive objectives for which he was fighting. As Brigadier E. H. A. J. O'Donnell, Deputy Adjutant-General in the War Office, recorded towards the end of the war:

The democratic citizen of 1944 is generally an intelligent and reasonably well educated man who wants to know something about the rights and wrongs of the dispute to which he is asked to devote perhaps his life, and certainly years of discomfort and dislocation. He is no longer content to be actuated by slogans - he requires a sense of purpose.¹⁴²

However, not only was it possible for one soldier to

¹⁴¹ Gen. Sir Ronald F. Adam, "Adult Education in the Forces," *Adult Education* 18 (December 1945), p. 55.

¹⁴² Brig. E. H. A. J. O'Donnell, "Morale," *The Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 90 (February 1945), p. 2.

recall that having served in Britain throughout the war he never even heard of A.B.C.A. or *B.W.P.*,¹⁴³ but it was perhaps a reflection of the Army's determination to return to more traditional forms of education in the post-war years that Trevor Royle cites the experience of one group of young national servicemen who, on beginning their training at the R.A.E.C. School, were curtly informed by the Commandant that they didn't want any "dirty-pink L.S.E types" in the Corps.¹⁴⁴ The days of responsible citizenship were clearly over.

¹⁴³ Thomas Whilde, letter to the author, October 1988.

¹⁴⁴ Trevor Royle, *The Best Years of their Lives. The National Service Experience 1945-63* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986), p. 62.

8. CONCLUSION

Having examined some of the major areas of Army life, it seems apparent that the military authorities were compelled to effect a good deal of social change in the Army during the Second World War. It became an institution seemingly more careful of human values, more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the ordinary soldier, and more democratic in spirit. Looking back from 1944, William Shebbeare observed: "The changes that have been made in the British Army in the past four years have been very great. It is difficult now to remember how backward our army was in 1939."¹

The most important reason for this change was the absorption of large numbers of civilians into the Army, and the need to create from them a fighting force of high morale and efficiency capable of taking on the Axis powers. It was no coincidence that the bulk of the reforms took place during 1940-42 when military prospects looked bleakest. The fact that the Army began the war with a series of defeats rather than victories meant that much of the complacency about previous methods was challenged and new techniques more readily employed.²

Public and political pressures also seem to have played

¹Captain X [William G. C. Shebbeare], *A Soldier Looks Ahead* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1944), p. 7.

²Jack Davies, letters to the author, August 1989, July 1990.

their part. Because so many families became intimately associated with the Army during the war so it came under the civilian microscope, perhaps as never before. In this sense the press, and in particular newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* which acted as the self-appointed champion of citizens in uniform, was an important background influence. Likewise, every aspect of the Army came under intense parliamentary scrutiny and a vocal lobby group of M.P.s constantly harried the War Office over reform.

The role of personalities was also important and none more so than the Adjutant-General, General Adam, under whom much of the change took place. Although apparently no different in social outlook from any of his military contemporaries, he emerges as a man with a deep understanding of the new citizen Army and as a reformer to rival any that the Service may previously have had. Regarded with deep suspicion by Churchill,³ and not with a little distrust by some of his fellow senior officers,⁴ he was lauded by the outside experts he sponsored in the Army and characterized by one columnist as the Army's "number one democrat."⁵ Another commentator, Brigadier

³ Public Record Office, War Office Papers [hereafter WO], WO 259/77, Prime Minister's Personal Minute, Serial No. M.159/3., 13 March 1943.

⁴ S. P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale. Current Affairs and Citizenship Training in the British Army 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 120.

⁵ Vincent Sullivan, "Army's No 1 Democrat," *Leicester Evening Mail*, 27 April 1946, p. 3.

Shelford Bidwell, has described Adam as one of the most enlightened men ever to have held the post of Adjutant-General.⁶

Furthermore, there does seem to have been a "New Jerusalem" element in some aspects of military thinking, characterized by the notion that the Army had a role to play in helping to shape post-war society and that it could send its wartime recruits back into civilian life as more enlightened citizens than before. It was a new concept of the Army as a positive social force rather than as a retrogressive element in society.

Indeed, it has to be recognized that much of the change that took place within the Army did not occur within a vacuum, but alongside similar changes that were taking place in civilian society: the rise of new management techniques, the introduction of joint production committees, the breaking down of class barriers, the extension of welfare provision and advances in educational thinking. In some senses, then, the experience of the Army seems to bear out the views of Arthur Marwick and others over the radicalizing effects of the war on society.⁷

⁶Brig. Shelford Bidwell; foreword to *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* by Norman F. Dixon (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 13.

⁷Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War. War Peace and Social Change 1900-1967* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), pp. 15-17.

What was apparent within this process of social change, in terms of the relationship between the Army and society, was that in both method and composition the Army perhaps became more a part of the nation than ever before. In seeking to shape the wartime citizen Army into an effective fighting force, the military authorities were compelled to import many of the values of the civilian society from which its members were drawn, and utilize the civilian expertise it incorporated to its own ends. An impressive array of psychologists, psychiatrists, journalists, lawyers, broadcasters, educationalists, cinematographers, professional entertainers and other specialists were employed in their civilian capacity on military related tasks, and these brought with them new techniques and approaches to these problems.

Moreover, whilst the Army took from civilian society, it also gave back, and through new initiatives such as the War Office Selection Boards, which were widely emulated by civilian organizations after the war in the selection of high grade personnel,⁸ and the Army Legal Aid Scheme, which provided the model for the post-war reform of the

⁸ Philip E. Vernon and John B. Parry, *Personnel Selection in the British Forces* (London: University of London Press, 1949), p. 66; Jack Davies, letter to the author, February 1990.

civil legal system,⁹ we see the development of a closer and more mutually beneficial relationship between the Army and society. This was a relationship in which the Army utilized the civilian expertise which it had absorbed, and harnessed it to solving military problems, and in turn civilian society learned from the Army and adapted and applied military solutions to some of its own problems.

Although social change undoubtedly took place in the Army during the Second World War, questions have to be raised about just how profound this change actually was. Whilst there were certainly traditionalist elements in the highest ranks of the Army and the military establishment who hindered progress, the biggest problems in this respect seem to have been the middle ranking officers who controlled the Army on a day-to-day basis, the majority of whom were regulars. Well schooled in the values of the pre-war Army, it was clear that a good many had little time for the new reforms and either partially implemented them or simply ignored them; a problem compounded by the fact that the War Office had no satisfactory means of ensuring that they were carried out. One soldier summed up the dilemma:

⁹WO 32/14569, Standing Committee on Army Post-War Problems. Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of No. 9 Working Party, Appendix "F" to S.C.W./P(48)5., 8 June 1948; *Legal Aid and Advice Bill* (P.P., Bills: Public, vol. 3, 1948-49).

All the schemes of the Higher Command depend on co-operation from C.O.s. To give that co-operation they must understand the spirit which motivates these schemes and they must be willing to foster that spirit. But it is only very rarely there seems to be any C.O. sufficiently enlightened in mind to be capable of doing either.... The stumbling block is that there is no way of getting past the C.O. The situation is that of a well-meaning Army Council distributing sensible plans which are never sufficiently well disseminated to become operative; and of their having no means whatever, beyond the words of the C.O. passed up through the usual channels, of finding out whether or not their schemes are being put into operation.¹⁰

Indeed, in the light of a good deal of non-cooperation on the part of commanding officers, and the fact that in a number of respects the Army seemed to put back the clock after the war, it is perhaps fair to conclude that what changes took place were not as deep-seated nor as deep-rooted as some might have wished. In this sense, the experience of the Army seems to bear out the views of Angus Calder and others, namely that the war might not have had quite the radicalizing effect on society that has been attributed to it.¹¹

By 1945 the British Army was, in many ways, a more progressive and enlightened social institution than that of 1939, and in the context of its social history it had taken a significant step forward. Yet as William Shebbeare himself was compelled to admit, shortly before

¹⁰ Tom Harrisson Mass-Observation Archive, FR 937, 31 October 1941.

¹¹ Angus Calder, *The People's War. Britain 1939-45* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 17-18.

his death in the fighting in Normandy: "... there is plenty of room for still further advance."^{1 2}

^{1 2} Captain X, p. 77. Maj. William Godolphin Conway Shebbeare, 23rd Hussars, was killed on 18 July 1944, aged twenty-eight. He has no known grave but is commemorated on the Bayeux Memorial, Panel 8, Column 1.

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